



Louise Barker Hancock

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# TWO DAUGHTERS OF ONE RACE

BY

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"We were two daughters of one race,  
She was the fairest in the face."

—TENNYSON.

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## TWO DAUGHTERS OF ONE RACE.

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### CHAPTER I.

“FOR my lady,” said the maid, as she handed a letter to my grandmother, Frau von Werthern. The old lady aroused herself from her waking dream, let her work fall from her hands, brought her spectacles down from their resting-place on her forehead, placed them firmly before her eyes, and then studied the superscription.

All was quiet in the room, with that unearthly quiet which follows days of pain and sorrow. For over two weeks scarcely a word had been spoken in our household which had not been absolutely necessary.

Now I was almost frightened when my grandmother called to me in energetic tones :

“Helena !”

“Yes, grandmother.”

“Call Lotta.”

I rose and went into the next room. We called it our boudoir; the floor was covered with a soft, rich carpet; my dead mother's furniture stood there, and my flowers, and Lotta's piano and easel.

“Lotta!” I called; for I did not at first see her. She rose from the couch upon which she was lying, and looked at me with her sad eyes, whose deep lustre much weeping had not darkened.

“What is it?” she asked in her clear, ringing tones. “Has any one come to see us?”

“No, Lotta: grandmother wishes to speak to us.” She sighed, but followed me, and we went back together to the other room. The old lady regarded us sorrowfully and earnestly over the rim of her glasses, then gave me the letter.

“Read, Helena,” she said abruptly.

“From whom is it?” asked Lotta.

“Wait, little princess,” was the answer. “Sit here, child, and you shall hear immediately.” Lotta made an impatient movement, but sank obediently upon the nearest chair and bowed her head upon her hands. She seemed very submissive, but I knew only too well how to interpret the quivering of her lips.

I began reading:

“ DEAREST FRAU VON WERTHERN :

“ I have been both shocked and saddened by your letter. What is man, I have asked myself, that he should carry his head so high and think himself so great and mighty? A trifling accident overtakes him, and all his pomp and splendor pass away. Alas! dear Frau von Werthern, it is hard to see any one die, but it is hardest of all to see your own child go, when God calls him to himself. And so in spirit I press your hand and say that I feel for you and mourn with you for your son. I myself have lost three children, three great, splendid boys, but let that rest, dear friend. Your loss is much more severe; he was your only son. As to the rest of your letter to me, I shall answer it at once. Life here is not hard, living is not dear, and you can get rooms—nothing like apartments in the aristocratic quarter of Berlin, of course—but still cosy and comfortable. My Fritz has reckoned that upon your income you can live here like the Queen-Dowager herself, at any rate a great deal better than in the capital.

“ Five hundred thalers is quite a nice income for three ladies, and if the girls are industrious about the house, and you content yourself with one servant, you can throw off all care. As far as we are concerned we shall always be glad to assist you. I know a very nice lodging in our immediate neighborhood, and if you and your grandchildren should come, you shall stay with us until your new home is put in order.

“ How long it is since we saw each other last! In those days you were the centre and soul of us all, and I, a young and joyous wife. My dear husband was by my side and my boys were small. I remember how we used to dance

on the barn floor at Borsfeld, at the harvest home. But now the leaves have fallen from the trees, dear Frau von Werthern, and the swallows have flown away ; Borsfeld has passed into the hands of strangers, and the young and jovial officer who danced so gayly with us in those days is—dead, and his daughters are left to your care. But ”— (here the letter came suddenly to an end, and the paper was stained with the writer’s tears).

“ Fritz and I send hearty greeting to all.

“ Faithfully your friend,

“ FREDERICA R.”

Then came a postscript.

“ The lodging of which I spoke rents for sixty thalers a year.”

“ That is just right,” nodded my grandmother, after a long pause. “ Sit down, Helena, and write her to engage the lodgings, and say that I thank her very much for her kind information.”

“ To whom shall I write ? ” I stammered, full of fear, and we both stared vacantly into the old lady’s face as she went on quietly with her knitting.

“ To Frau Frederica Roden.”

“ Are we going to move there, grandmamma ? ” I said inquiringly.

“ We are indeed, in October.”

She let the knitting fall from her hands and looked from me to Lotta. The face of my beau-



tiful sister had become a dark red, and she sat biting the end of her handkerchief.

“We cannot remain here,” said the old lady softly; “this suite of rooms costs us our entire annual income. In losing your father you also lose your life of ease, for he surrendered the residue of his fortune to Hans, in order to give the boy another start in America. I hope you both will submit and accommodate yourselves to the inevitable, and will do all you can to assist me in bearing the burden which God has laid upon me at the edge of the grave. You too, little princess, what do you say? Give me your hand.”

The young girl arose and laid her hand for a moment in the speaker's shrivelled palm, then drew it hastily away and went out. From the adjoining room a sharp sound came back to us, half a laugh and half a sob, then all was still. I sat at the writing-desk and held the pen with a trembling hand. It seemed impossible for me to write to this strange woman whom I did not know, who lived in an unknown place whither fate was sending us, and about which I knew nothing except that it was near Borsfeld, the ancient seat of the Werthern family, before they were overtaken by misfortune.

When I had finally written the answer and

taken it to my grandmother for perusal, she looked up at me with a troubled face. I have never seen another pair of eyes as wise as hers—and I never saw any moisture in them or any sign of weakness. Even on the day of my father's funeral—and he was her only son—there were no traces of tears. But I always loved to look into those clear, honest, and faithful eyes, for they inspired me with confidence and trust. Her expression was severe, open, and self-reliant, such as a woman always acquires when her husband is only an overgrown child, and, instead of a helpmeet, is a continual care and cross.

My grandfather had been such a child, thoughtless, violent, easily roused to anger, and warm-hearted; and he left to his wife the entire care of the household and children. This was a family trait with the Wertherns.

"It will do quite well, Helena," said my grandmother. "Now tell me what you think of our plan."

"Anything will suit me," I answered, quite surprised, for throughout my life I had so seldom been asked for my opinion.

"That is well: you are certainly more reasonable than Lotta. Yet she is not to blame that she revolts from all this; she is just like her mother, who always was a madcap."

Lotta was my half-sister ; Hans, who was two years her senior, was her full brother. I was the eldest. I had never known my mother, for she died when I was born. And scarcely a year and a half later my father married a second time.

“She is only eighteen years old, grandmother,” I said apologetically.

“And you are quite aged?” she answered with a faint smile ; “two-and-twenty years is certainly an advanced age.”

“But I know the world which Lotta must now leave, just when it is opening so attractively before her.”

“Certainly it is hard,” said my grandmother, as she looked out into the quiet, aristocratic street where our dwelling was situated. “But,” she resumed, turning to me, “it is not the worst thing that could happen. It would be worse for us to remain here and starve under the eyes of those who have known us in our better days ; that would be a thousand times worse. When one becomes as old as I, one knows that.” And she nodded her head in silence.

“Who must, has no option,” she began again. “To-morrow we will decide upon what furniture we can afford to take with us, and will sell the rest.”

As she said this her voice trembled. It is very

sad to come to poverty in one's old age after having passed a long life of comfort. Hans was the cause of it all. He was to blame for our penniless condition, to blame for our father's death, to blame that two portionless girls hung like burrs upon an old woman who otherwise, had she been alone, would have had sufficient to keep her in comfort for the rest of her life. The thought rushed in upon me: "You must not allow it. You must do something for yourself."

"Grandmother," I began hurriedly, "I will not go to Rotenberg; I will—I will get a situation somewhere. You know I have taken charge of the housekeeping here."

She shook her gray head.

"No, Helena, I cannot spare you; you must remain with me. And Lotta—who is a mere child yet, and any way not fit to take your place—I shall care for you both as long as I can. God will do the rest. You must both remain with me. Go now, and see that Lotta don't break her heart weeping—the poor baby."

I went to her, but did not find her weeping.

Her cheeks were feverishly red, and she had a volume of Meyers's Encyclopædia in her hands. When she saw me she cried, "O Helena, only listen to this: 'Rotenberg, in the township of X,



district of T, a county town of five thousand inhabitants'—Helena, do you grasp it?—'five thousand inhabitants'! 'The people are principally engaged in agriculture and cattle-raising; there is a high-school, two churches, and a needle factory'—Great heavens!—a needle factory, and—O wonder!—'a ducal palace with a beautiful park, which has, however, been uninhabited since 1815, when the ducal residence was removed to Kerrburg'!"

She had read on with increasing excitement.

"God have mercy on me if I am to bury myself there!"

"It may be very nice there, after all," I said encouragingly.

"Very nice! You good soul! I generally find that what is called 'very nice' is sure to be a dreadful bore."

"Don't borrow trouble, little princess; it will be better than we think."

She did not answer, but an ironical smile played around her lips.

"I am going to the churchyard now," I said; "will you come with me?"

She rose without a word, and took down her black hat, and went to the mirror to put back the dark curls which had fallen low over the forehead, and then took up her gloves,

Gloomily and with knit brows she walked by my side, and numberless glances of admiration were cast toward her by those whom we met on our way. Even I could not abstain from looking at her repeatedly.

Yes, my sister Lotta was undeniably the loveliest, most charming creature in our great city,—so thought I, so thought we all, and, I almost believe, so thought she herself. She had been her father's darling, the favorite of us all, "the little princess," as we had ever called her since the day upon which she had taken her first steps. I can see her yet in her pretty blue frock and her dainty red shoes. From that time on I had watched over her and cared for her like a mother, but I was always astonished that this dainty little creature could be my sister.

She always responded to my passionate tenderness with moods and tears, and sometimes with stormy caresses, after the manner of spoiled children who feel that they have us completely in their power. In this way she invariably carried her point.

After her mother's death, her earnest, enthusiastic affection concentrated itself upon Hans. The two children made common cause against their father, their grandmother, and myself. They treated me as though I had not the right to be

called sister, and seemed to forget that we had the same father to love. They were always united and ready to defend one another. When the trouble with Hans began, when the knowledge of his irregular life came home to us, and he had violent scenes with his father, which ended in a breach between the two, Lotta was just the same and would believe nothing to his discredit. And finally, when he was forced to quit the army and go to America, she cried and fainted, and seemed driven to despair. Even the death of her father had not roused her from this painful lethargy. All she said was that Hans would now be altogether desolate; and while grandmother and I thought of him in bitterness of spirit, she bemoaned his fate as though he were enduring a hard, undeserved punishment.

The summer evening was closing in rapidly, the last beams of the sun fell, glowing darkly, upon the broad promenade, enveloping the countless throng of riders, carriages, and pedestrians in its transparent glory. The leaves of the trees on both sides of the street were gray with dust, and even the shrubbery in the beautifully kept gardens presented a similar grayish hue:

“How suffocating it is,” I remarked, but Lotta did not seem to agree with me. Her dark eyes gazed eagerly at this beautiful sunset picture.

now and then she responded to the greeting of an acquaintance, bowing her head proudly, and once she blushed slightly as an officer of the Guards raised his hand in salutation as he rode past.

“That is Eberhard von Stollen, Hans’s best friend,” she said. “Poor Hans !”

“And who is to blame for his ruin,” I responded bitterly.

“To blame !” she answered. “Our circumstances are to blame, our miserable circumstances. If we had a great fortune, Hans would be the most honorable of men.”

I was silent ; it was always the same answer. At last the quiet green churchyard lay before us, and a deep peace came over me.

Far behind lay the noise and clamor of the streets. Only a few figures lingered at different graves. In the middle path two old ladies walked up and down ; the gravedigger had once told us that they came there daily for a promenade. It had always seemed to me queer that they should select such a spot, but within the last fortnight I had begun to understand it. Here was peace and rest and hope, and the end of all earthly strife.

We sat down quietly, side by side, on a little bench before three mounds. Yonder my moth-



er's, then Lotta's mother's, and now this new grave of our father.

Neither of us wept ; there was defiance in our hearts as we both thought of Hans. Did he know of this new grave ? Had the sad news already reached him, when he had scarcely set foot on dry land ?

A severe, cruel message for him ! I could see him in my mind's eye ; how shocked he was as he blamed himself for his father's sudden death. I knew he would weep and tear his hair, and half an hour after he would be whistling a merry love song, or seeking any amusement which came in his way. Incomprehensible, lovable, kindly Hans !

Lotta rose suddenly and went to her father's grave, where she kneeled down, throwing her arms over the mound, and began to cry bitterly ; her whole frame seemed to rise and sink in suppressed agony.

For a quarter of an hour she remained in this position, and I did not disturb her. At last she arose and dried her eyes, saying : " There is no help for it, we must just try and see what we can make out of this wretched existence."

" What do you mean ?" I asked her.

She looked down with an expression of indifference at the leaves beneath her feet, and replied : " Hans always said that men were like

the puppets in my child's theatre, and we pulled the wires as we chose ; he was a perfect heathen in his belief."

I looked at her questioningly.

"But I—" she said sharply, rubbing her red eyes as she spoke—"will not be a puppet ; I will not. I do not care to live this way any longer."

She turned away abruptly, and stepped out from between the graves so quickly that I could scarcely follow her.

We returned home in silence. When we arrived there Lotta threw herself upon the sofa, and began stroking and petting "Schnips," the dog which Hans had left behind, and to whisper to him of his master. When the animal heard the word "master" he pricked up his ears and sprang for the door, as if he waited for the familiar step, then came back to Lotta and looked at her questioningly with his wise, bright eyes. Then she lifted the little animal up again, and stroked his yellow hair. "No, I will not!"—I heard her say once more.

The following weeks were passed in preparation for our change of residence. The old lady sat in her own room and studied the plan of the house at Rotenberg, laid her measuring-rule on the chart and marked out the spot where each piece of furniture was to be placed, and then

made up a list of what was to be sold, on a great sheet of paper.

There was a fearful crying time whenever Lotta learned that any favorite article was going into the hands of strangers; the dining-room with its carved oak furniture was guarded, piece by piece, by her, but to no purpose. It was not possible for her to part with it, she said.

“We can part with it easiest of all,” decided my grandmother. “What we will keep are remembrances of your mother’s; that trumpery there was bought by Wilhelm”—so she named my dead father—“shortly after he became commander of his regiment, because his new position required him to keep up a certain state. I take my dear old things, you have your boudoir; we will have only three rooms, so you must be contented, Lotta.”

But Lotta would not be comforted. On the day when the dealer came to take away the furniture, she lay upon the sofa positively ill from weeping; she sobbed day and night, and was pale and miserable, and finally we were obliged to send for a physician.

“Nerves!” said the kind old man. “She must have change of air. It is a good thing she is leaving Berlin; country air far from the large city, that is what she needs.”

But I grew more anxious about her. On the last evening of our stay in Berlin she cried incessantly. I sat down on the bed beside her and took her small, hot hand in mine.

“Lotta, my dear sister,” I begged, “have a little confidence in me. Is it not true that you are leaving something behind that——”

“Yes, yes,” she sobbed, “all my happiness——”

“And your heart, little princess?”

“What nonsense!” she answered in a changed tone as she ceased weeping.

“I thought it must be so, because you are so unhappy, and Hans’s friend came into my mind; you know—Eberhard von Stollen? you have danced with him very frequently, Lotta?” She did not answer immediately, but gave a low laugh. “Why should I grieve over him?” she said finally; “he has more debts than Hans had.”

“I know that. But if you love him it is one more reason for you to weep.”

“I marry a poor man?” she asked brusquely. “Helena, you are foolish. It is so dreadful to be poor; it is such a calamity. Even if he was a very god—never! No, there I would be a puppet again, and to that I will never agree.”

“Oh!” I said, astonished, for my head began to swim for the moment. She certainly

had received his very marked attentions with pleasure.

“What crime have I committed?” she inquired.

“You certainly did not discourage him.”

“That is true, while his uncle was still alive,” she remarked dryly.

I knew what that meant. The nephew had been regarded as the old man’s future heir; but now the uncle was dead, and the nephew had not been remembered.

“So there are no prospects in that direction, now,” added Lotta with a yawn.

Such cool calculation affected me painfully.

“I believe you do love him, and that is what you have been crying about.”

“That is all your imagination,” she answered indifferently; “I am not at all sentimental.”

“Then I need not distress myself further,” I said coldly.

“Not at all,” she answered shortly, and turned her beautiful head to the other side.

I turned away bewildered and entered my dead father’s room. The full moon cast her pale light in at the windows from which the curtains had already been removed, and showed me the blank, empty walls. My heart was indescribably sad. What had come over Charlotte in the last few

weeks? Had misfortune thrown these sombre shadows over her young spirit, or were these merely traits of an unlovely character which manifested themselves for the first time, now that the sun no longer shone upon our household? There are souls who are made tender and good by misfortune, and there are souls whom suffering destroys.

I went to the window and looked out, trying to find some reason for Charlotte's words, and some excuse for her selfishness, but I could find only one. She had been too much indulged, too much pampered, by me, by our father, by our grandmother, and, last of all, by society.

"Yes, certainly, we were to blame," I said to myself musingly. "Helena, what would you yourself have been, had the whole world lain at your feet, as at those of your beautiful sister, while your every wish was gratified even before it was expressed? Would you be the quiet, demure, world-wise, old-fashioned little woman that you are now?"

It had been no light task to grow so sensible before my time; life had as many attractions for me as it had for her; and oh, I should have been so delighted to please and to shine in the brilliant ballroom. But no; in society I was ever only Lotta's sister. The men called us



the beautiful Fräulein Werthern and "her sister."

I heard myself so named once in conversation, and the words fell from the lips of one to whose laughter and chatting I had ever listened with delight—with too great delight.

"Her sister"—and in such a tone, too.

And then a young married woman behind me remarked that I dressed just like my beautiful sister, but she queried, "Did you ever see any two so unlike as those Werthern girls?"

On that night I stood before the mirror for a long time in my quiet room, and resolved never again to make a ballroom toilet, and I had kept my word. It seemed as though now for the first time I had wakened to a knowledge or distrust of myself. I found that my father, my grandmother, Hans, even the servants, all looked on me as "her sister." Lotta—Lotta was ever and always first, and I had unconsciously always conceded the first place to her.

For a time I was very sad, but I quickly conquered all such feelings, and, strong in my determination to be of use, soon found myself necessary to all as house-mother and general adviser. Many a time the old hopeless longing for a life of gayety came over me; then I would leave my housekeeping and my darning and go

away to my room, to bury my tearful eyes in my pillow. And after I had had my cry out, it seemed an easy matter to array the little princess for the ball and then take up again my household cares. As time passed I became happier and more contented—until the misfortunes came: our father dead, our brother far away and miserable, and we without means, quite without means when our aged grandmother should have passed away.

How fearful, how desolate lay our future before me!

As I stood at the window in the moonlight, on this last night in my old home, I looked down into the small court at the acacia that had been my father's delight; it was leafless now. The tree had always made me sad; it seemed like a prisoner shut in between the gray walls of the back building; to-night I thought there was no more beautiful outlook in the whole world. I felt I could not part from that lonely tree, upon which strange eyes would so soon look from out this very window.





## CHAPTER II.

YES, the parting was harder for us than we had imagined, although we left nothing behind but the dead past.

There had been frost that morning, and the air was keen as we drove through the slumbering city to the station.

We had taken leave of no one, and had been careful to conceal the hour of our departure ; so we were left unmolested, and could care for our baggage and slip into a third-class carriage without notice. Lotta, who had paid out her last bit of pocket-money for a dog's ticket for " Schnips," sat like a sacrificial lamb upon one of the hard seats ; she was very pale, but there were no tears to-day. I made my grandmother as comfortable as I could with a pillow for a seat and a cushion for her back, and placed a stool under her feet.

Lotta never stirred ; she looked straight ahead at the mass of houses through which the train cut its way, holding fast in her hands a great

bunch of violets which had been left for her the evening before with a card adorned with a coat-of-arms. As the train passed the few last straggling houses she threw the flowers out of the window with a violent movement, as though she would carry with her no reminder of what she had left behind. Then she took a deep breath, pulled her veil down over her face, and laid her head back, and so remained during her whole long journey.

The landscape became more beautiful as we sped on our way ; we soon left the plains behind and entered a rolling country. The little villages peeping out from the gay foliage of the autumn-tinted woods was an agreeable sight, with the cloudless blue of the heavens overhead.

It was the first clear day after a long rainy season,—September's parting greeting.

All around us was so bright that my heart gained courage, and I soon found myself again making plans and building castles in the air. Who knows what Fortune might have in store for us at our journey's end ? Perhaps she already sat at the entrance of our little dwelling, and only waited for our arrival to pelt us with roses. Lotta might find a prince, and our grandmother perhaps renew her strength in the exhilarating

air and in the company of old acquaintances ; and who knows but some day there would come a knock on the chamber door, and who should be there but Hans, come back to us again, quiet and thoughtful, with all his frivolity left behind.

That would be best of all. Then I aroused myself from my day-dreams, and moved nearer to my grandmother, took her hand in mine, and looked into the sad, faded face. "All will be well yet," I said ; "all will be well !"

The old lady nodded her head earnestly : "And why not ? Still it is providential that the future is hidden from us."

Before the sun sank we were at the end of our railway journey. We stopped at Triebelsburg—the nearest station to Rotenberg—to take the stage to that village, for no railway went through it.

"Now comes the most trying part of our journey," said my grandmother. "I shall probably be half dead when you lift me from this seat of torture at Rotenberg, but it cannot be helped ; so come on. Lotta, give me your arm ; Helena, look after the luggage, and see it is safely placed in that Noah's ark."

The long, narrow conveyance, drawn by two worn-out horses, which met my eyes as I hurried round the corner of the station, was no reassuring spectacle.

A little to one side, however, a pair of large, well-fed dapple grays were pawing the gravel, and on the box of the fine old coach sat a coachman dressed in a sort of livery. He was a splendid-looking young fellow, and held his whip, on which was fluttering a gay red ribbon, as a sentinel holds his musket, whistling the while a lively air.

I was greatly impressed with the appearance of this equipage. I turned to look at it a second time as I passed along, and said to myself, "If I only had that for grandmamma!"

Just then some one stepped in between me and the object of my admiration, and a man's voice said: "Pardon me, madame, but have I the honor of speaking to Fräulein von Werthern? I am Fritz Roden, and have come to take you to Rotenberg. Our carriage is here."

I was pleased with his kindly manner from the first word he had uttered, and laid my hand cordially in the young man's extended palm.

It was a pair of honest, earnest eyes that looked down at me in a half-embarrassed manner, for Fritz Roden was a young giant and over a head taller than I, although I was by no means a small woman. These eyes looked out from under a high forehead, above which the blond hair lay in crisp curls, just as light and thick as



our own Hans's. I had the feeling that this was not an entire stranger, and hastened to introduce him to my grandmother and sister, who were coming toward us, and who were rejoiced at the sight of a comfortable carriage in which to make the remainder of their journey, and to receive such kindly attention on the threshold of their new home.

Yet there was unquestionably something awkward about this young man, for, as he now turned to grandmamma and Lotta, he did not know what to say; he only stammered, and shook the old lady by the hand as he would a young comrade; and when Lotta, who had thrown back her veil and looked him well over, greeted him with a charming smile, he became so red that he was almost purple, and turned hastily away to call the carriage.

When we had taken our seats he declined, reddening still more, to take a seat by me—Lotta could never ride backwards—but swung himself up on the box by the coachman.

Lotta regarded the coachman, the horses, and even the embroidered cover that lay on the carriage cushions, with the same cool glance that she had bestowed upon Herr Roden. She found a comfortable place for the dog, between her grandmother and herself, drew her heavy black

veil over her pale face, in order to prevent her hair from being blown about by the evening wind, and then sank back into dreamland, as if that were the proper place.

My grandmother slept, and Schnips laid his head on Lotta's lap, blinked a little, and then fell asleep also. The carriage went on steadily toward its journey's end, the sun sank beneath the horizon in fiery red, and the night came on quickly.

I looked out into the distance so long and so steadily that my eyes began to ache, and when I turned to look at my companions I could only see them through a haze. Fritz Roden was still on the coachman's box, and had turned half way around to look at Lotta ; and when I looked at her I found she was staring at him also, but with a defiant expression in her beautiful large eyes, as if she would ask : " Who are you ? What do you want ? Is it really worth the trouble to observe you at all ? "

I could not understand her in the least ; my feeling of happiness suddenly disappeared ; I felt chilled, and her expression angered me, although I could not tell why.

After a little while Lotta leaned over and whispered laughingly in my ear :

" They are all of one stripe, Helena, the heavy

gray horses, and the great man in the top-boots and jacket ; the horses will never run away, and he——”

She stopped abruptly, for at that moment Herr Roden turned around to us and said :

“ Now we are almost home ! ”

It had by this time grown quite dark. The carriage went quickly through a dark lane, and then rattled over a wretched stone pavement, so that grandmother was aroused from her nap and forced to sit erect. Now we passed houses with bright lights shining through the windows ; then went through a gateway on to a broad, level carriage sweep, overshadowed on either side by the branches of fine old trees, and beyond through the darkness I could discern a large rambling building ; and to the right a wonderful medley of walls and picturesque gables which reached high up toward the dark evening sky ; then we passed under another archway into the wide court.

Bright windows welcomed us, dogs barked joyously around the carriage, which stopped before the hospitable, wide-open door, and from the entrance hall a little old lady came forward hastily to greet us.

“ Frau von Werthern ! ” she cried, “ what a pleasure ! Ah !—and the two dear children—— ”

The quiver in her voice told of the tears

she kept back. And that was Fritz Roden's mother.

I thought, as we delayed long at the bountifully supplied table, I should never grow tired looking at her kindly face. Ah, if I could only describe all that its gentleness expressed to me. We sat in a large room with low ceiling, and snow-white curtains at its windows. The floor was of boards and well polished. In the centre stood the table, with its coverings of fine homespun damask and its quaint old china. On the wall hung a large clock, and under it stood a heavy mahogany secretaire ; a great stove covered with yellow Dutch tiles stood in the corner and kept up a merry roar, and near by was a comfortable-looking easy-chair. And then there was the sprightly little hostess with her good face, and the blue eyes in which every now and then the tears glistened.

How carefully the big son guarded his mother, as though she were a child, and how proudly she glanced after her only boy when he crossed the room, or when he in his quiet manner corrected her hasty speech. There was no trace of embarrassment here, where he was the master ; his position seemed suddenly to give him a dignity which sat well upon his youthful countenance.

He stood behind his chair and asked a short blessing, after which he took his seat opposite his mother and carved the wild-fowl skilfully.

The two old ladies sat on either side of him, and Lotta and I completed the little circle. Lotta was silent, but no word or action of either mother or son escaped her.

“One can readily see, Frau von Werthern,” said our friendly hostess, “that these two dear girls are only half-sisters; they do not resemble one another in the least.”

“Yet a family resemblance is very perceptible,” responded my grandmother, who was always pained when any speech referring to the dissimilarity in our appearance was made.

“Not the least vestige!” declared Fritz Roden as he took a deep draught from his glass. “I believe it would be impossible to find one point of resemblance; the one is a blonde, the other a brunette.” Then he finished his glass and arose.

“I hope you ladies will be pleased,” he said simply; “in the first place with our house, but more especially with your new home. You will not find it so bad here, after all. Men with kind hearts are to be found everywhere, and the sun shines just as brightly over our little Rotenberg as over Berlin’s sea of houses. Our air is cer-

tainly fresher, it blows over wood and field before it gets into our streets, and the snow is whiter and purer than in the great city, and even the roses are brighter and more fragrant. My heart's wish is that the roses of peace and contentment may bloom here for you all. What my mother and I are able to do for your comfort you may rest assured we will, and with all our hearts."

He shook hands warmly with each of us, and when he came to Lotta I noticed that the same half-contemptuous smile played round her small mouth, but he did not seem to perceive it.

Frau Roden had taken both my grandmother's hands in her own, and her eyes were wet as she whispered that they would strain every nerve to make us comfortable in Rotenberg.

"Have you ever been in Berlin?" Lotta suddenly asked the young man.

It was the first word that she had spoken, and the vibrating tones of her voice seemed to strike Frau Roden unpleasantly.

"I served my year in the army in that city," Fritz answered quietly.

"In what regiment?"

"In the 10th Guards."

"In Hans's regiment!" cried Lotta joyfully.

"I knew your brother," he said, and looked at



my grandmother critically, as though he feared to wound her.

“He was, I suppose, your superior officer, and you were doubtless in his company,” said Lotta, playing carelessly with her teaspoon on a fruit-dish.

“You are almost right,” he responded, smiling; “he had just become an ensign.”

“Hans has caused us great sorrow,” began my grandmother suddenly; “he brought his sisters to penury and sent his father to the grave. My son accompanied him to Bremen, from which port he sailed, and came back to Berlin ill from excitement and grief. On the following day heart disease ended his life.”

There was a deathly stillness in the room after my grandmother ceased speaking, only broken by the clatter of the spoon which Lotta let fall heavily on her plate.

“A hard accusation,” Frau Roden said at last.

“But a just one,” responded the old lady; “he was a gambler.”

Lotta rose suddenly (like a wounded doe), and her great eyes filled with tears.

“I knew nothing of that,” said Fritz Roden. “I only know that once he gave his last piece of money to a poor soldier, in order that he might go home to bury his poor mother, and that he

plunged blindly into the Spree in order to save one who was wearied of life."

He looked toward Lotta as he spoke, and was answered by a glance so grateful and so warm that he became silent from embarrassment and looked into his glass.

"Yes, that was Hans," she cried, "and I know many more just such instances. But such infrequent occurrences are altogether out of the common track, and are rejected and despised as worthless to-day. Hans was a man who——"

"Who was very inconsiderate," said my grandmother, completing the sentence, "just those traits which you emphasize show a lack of any earnestness and of any mature reflection. There is an old proverb: 'Over-great goodness is no goodness!'"

Lotta was silent, but she looked over toward the young man as if she expected help. But when he did not speak, and only nodded his head as if in approval, the old contemptuous smile came back to her lips, and she leaned back in her chair without any attempt to renew or sustain the conversation.

Frau Roden and my grandmother continued talking earnestly together until the clock struck ten.

My grandmother rose immediately. Candles

were brought to us in heavy brass sticks, and we were led through a great cold hall, which had about it a decided aroma of fresh milk, and up the broad stairs to the story above.

Fritz Roden accompanied us thus far, and then turned and once more wished us happiness in our Rotenberg abode, and at the same time bade us good-night. Then he whistled to his great hunting-dog, who had lain near him all evening, and went out.

“He always goes out the last thing before retiring, to see that all is right for the night,” explained his mother proudly. “When my dear husband died, and he took charge of the estate, I was at first very anxious as to how it would all be managed, for Fritz was very young then; but all went on as quietly and smoothly—thank God!—as we could desire. The only thing he needs now is a wife, for I am beginning to realize that I am not now as capable as in other days, and prove at times of little assistance to him. But—please turn to the left, Frau von Werthern.”

The large, square hall through which we were passing was lined with wardrobes and chests of drawers, and from it we entered our sleeping-apartments, where the high snow-white beds invited us to repose.

Here, too, was a crackling wood fire in a Dutch stove—a wise protection against the keen autumn air. A pleasant smell of lavender pervaded the room. Everything was as cosy and snug as in the room we had just quitted.

Our grandmother was to have a room with a single window next to ours. And now our kind hostess asked us a thousand questions. Whether we preferred separate beds, or would we share one? Would we like milk or coffee in the morning? She promised to take us all to our new dwelling early the next day; it was near her own home, and she had been particularly anxious to have us near her. And the rooms were very pretty; they had been occupied formerly by a part of the prince's household.

The building had been called the "Cavalier's House," and had been built by one of the reigning family, a splendor-loving man with a taste for rococo, who was used to entertain such quantities of guests that even the rooms at the castle were not sufficient for their accommodation. The "Cavalier's House" was just opposite the castle, and on its second floor was this little suite of rooms where old documents had been kept. And Fritz had written immediately to see if they could be rented. And sure enough we found that they could, and the rent went to

the Children's Home which the duchess had recently founded.

"Yes, that's the way it was." To be sure the walls looked a little dingy, but the beautiful wainscoting looked very well again, since Hannah and Rieke had rubbed it well and polished it with wax. Everything, she assured us, looked most inviting now, and from the back room was a view into the garden. In the spring time that garden was one mass of purple lilacs, with their heavy perfume scenting the air, and just in the corner all the nightingales of Rotenberg assembled.

And then she wished us many times a restful, refreshing night, and said that the young ladies must have a care about their dreams, for they would surely dream about their future bridegrooms, and all such dreams would come true.

Then she went out and shut the door softly, as if we were already in deep slumber.

"Good-night!" said our grandmother, and went into her little room, and we began silently to prepare for the night. Lotta was still sitting in her white dressing-sacque on the edge of her bed, brushing her thick black hair, long after I had retired, and, when I was half asleep, suddenly I heard her laugh softly.

“What is it, little princess?” I asked, arousing myself.

She came over to me and sat on the edge of my bed, and asked me to braid her hair for her. While I was dividing the long strands she laughed again.

“Why are you laughing?” I asked again.

“Because I am amused,” she said, standing up, and throwing the long braids back on her neck.

“I think we are all so beautifully adapted to this idyllic existence; I certainly am, at least. Good-night, sister, do not dream of this excellent youth, who has certainly come into this world a hundred years too late. To-morrow I will read ‘Hermann and Dorothea’ once more, and think of ‘the comely son and the careful housewife.’”

“I am pleased with everything here, Lotta,” I said sharply.

“Of course you are, you dear old soul,” she answered carelessly. “Everything is so ancient and smells of the barnyard. You know you always had a fancy for village tales.”

“Hush, Lotta!”

“Ah! I have a longing for Berlin, a deadly longing!” and she sighed deeply. “If I remain here I shall die. I know it!” And with this sorrowful prophecy she laid her head upon her pillow and cried as if her heart would break.



I was nearly asleep again when I heard her call my name once more.

“What is it, Lotta—are you ill?”

But there sounded a low chuckle through the room: “Helena, did you see the large leather pocket, with its great heart of red morocco, which the worthy housewife had hung under her apron? That is where she keeps her milk pennies; she sells the foamy liquid herself. What would you think if ‘the comely son’ fell in love with either of us, and, when the wedding-day arrived, we were given, as emblems of our dignity, not only slippers and hoods, but also the penny bag?” And she laughed so merrily that I was perforce obliged to laugh too, although I saw little to excite mirth. Then I fell asleep, and, singularly enough, I dreamed I was at a large, white milk-table in the square hall, measuring with a glistening tin cup the fresh white milk, and near me lay the penny bag, and on it flamed and glowed the morocco heart; and in my dream I was so happy and calm and thoughtful.

Frau Roden had not said too much about our future dwelling; we had an abundance of room, much more than we had possessed in our palmy days.

To be sure, we had to mount a small flight of

steps which led direct from the garden. In former times this garden had been connected with the castle park, but it was now a part of the Roden estate.

Once above, we found ourselves in a small vestibule ; the walls were ceiled with wood, and three white and gilded doors led out from it into our rooms.

On the ceiling of the small room which overlooked the garden was a beautiful fresco framed about with garlands of stucco,—rosy Morning in her bright and flowing robes, floating upon the clouds, surrounded by cherubs scattering flowers. Medallions adorned the corners. The walls, on the other hand, had simply been painted white. The fireplace had been walled up ; and back in the corner, as if ashamed of its own shabbiness, stood a little rusty, round, sheet-iron stove.

“The children will sleep here,” my grandmother decided.

Frau Roden opened a door and called us to come out upon a pretty little balcony, enclosed by a lattice-work of wrought iron.

It was a magnificent prospect. The wide garden, with bright, gay colors, lay at our feet, and through the branches of the trees, half bereft of their leaves, we caught a glimpse of the land

beyond, and the blue mountains which lined the far horizon.

“You can consider the part of the garden that lies beneath us as your own property; for you will never be disturbed in it,” said our genial cicerone. “It is a romantic bit of wilderness, and young people like that sort of thing. It was always a most attractive place to my Fritz when he was a boy. Whenever I went to seek him I was sure to find him seated under one of the high trees reading, but nowadays he has no time to lie under trees with his books. But here, dearest Frau von Werthern, these are the front rooms.”

They were indeed two stately rooms, with high windows, and rich stucco on the ceilings, and in each room a comfortable-looking Dutch tile stove.

“This is better than we had dared to expect,” said my grandmother joyfully.

“Yes, dear friend. Not every one could have obtained these rooms. Or perhaps you think it would have made no difference to Fritz and me, who ran through our court and garden in order to get up here?—Yes, Fräulein Lotta, that is a very beautiful view, is it not? Those splendid rooms of the ducal castle opposite are the ones which are always occupied when any of the family come to Rotenberg. And see, there is Anita

taking advantage of this beautiful autumn day and throwing open all the windows."

I stepped over by Lotta and we both looked across. We saw there a woman's figure leaning out of a high window as she threw the green venetian blinds far back; and from out the dim room behind shone a rainbow-colored light, as a sunbeam struck the crystals of the chandelier and touched the rich gilt frames of the pictures.

Through the yellow silk hangings which the wind blew apart we saw the graceful figure of a tall, dark woman who stood at the window in meditation. She did not seem very young to the eye, but had a remarkably clear-cut face. There was something very singular in her countenance, and to me at least not altogether attractive.

"Who is it?" asked Lotta and I in one breath.

The face of the old lady assumed an angry expression as she answered: "The adopted daughter of the keeper of the chateau; she came either from Italy or Greece—nobody knows which—when she was about seventeen years old, I believe. The old governor was obliged to adopt her, for——"

She made a motion to my grandmother with her hand, as if to say, "We will not talk of her any more."

“She interests me greatly,” said Lotta.

“Ah, she is no companion for you,” said Frau Roden energetically, becoming very red in the face. “If you want company, our pastor has a fine little daughter, and the bürgermeister has three—all honest, good girls.”

Lotta had turned around, and was looking with surprise at the vehement speaker.

“I—company? I do not seek any here!” came slowly from her lips.

“Well, well,” said the old lady appeasingly. “You have misunderstood me, dear child—there was no harm meant. But you are entirely too young to become a recluse, and youth seeks youth. There are here, also, light young feet that dance joyously, and over in the town hall at carnival time there are beautiful dances and a fine orchestra; you ought to see my Fritz waltz. Do not be angry, dear child; so long as your heart aches, of course you do not think of gayeties. But, God willing, youthful pleasures and joys will return to you.”

Lotta had turned away at the first word, and did not again cast a glance at the speaker, but looked attentively toward the long row of windows in the castle walls.

A low thicket extended along the wall and the turnpike road which lay between it and our

house and led to the so-called castle square upon which the buildings fronted. This road terminated at Frau Roden's grounds, the entrance to which was concealed by a magnificent group of old chestnut-trees.

After a little while my grandmother called me into the second room, which she declared she would occupy, and we began considering attentively how we would place our furniture. We consulted Frau Roden about a servant and a speedy supply of fuel, and finally came back to the front room, where Lotta still stood leaning against the window like a black shadow.

I went up to her softly and put my arm around her waist, but she did not move ; she nodded her head slightly, as though responding to some one's greeting, and looking out I saw Fritz Roden, with his gun over his shoulder and his dog at his heels, and some wild birds in his hunting-pouch. He had already replaced his hat on his head, and went on toward his home, looking neither to the right nor to the left.

"The bear !" said Lotta, half aloud.





### CHAPTER III.

OUR first few weeks passed quickly. Our furniture had arrived, and we were busily employed getting our rooms in order ; curtains now hung at the windows, the floors were carpeted, and grandmother's gigantic four-post bed, with its red hangings, stood in a niche that seemed to have been built on purpose for it in her room.

A bright wood fire burned in the stove ; my sewing lay on a table near by ; grandmother looked out of the window, and Lotta was at her easel, while Schnips lay contentedly in his basket near the stove.

Everything was as it had been in Berlin, and yet how great the difference, I thought ; here all was so much better, and my heart began to beat quickly as I heard a heavy tread upon the wooden step outside, and, a second later, a knock on the door.

Lotta looked up from her canvas. " Goodness ?



there he is again!" she muttered. Then the door opened, and Fritz Roden stepped across the threshold.

"Good-morning, ladies! Good-morning, Frau von Werthern!"

He had three roses in his hand, which appeared slightly frost-bitten, and he handed one to each of us.

"These are the last," he said as he did so; "I found them in a sheltered spot,—and now, how are you all?"

He drew a chair near the window, and, sitting down, answered the question himself.

"Well? Of course, how could you be otherwise, living such a comfortable, quiet life?"

"We are getting to feel quite at home, dear Fritz, and we have you and your dear mother, my dear Frederica, to thank for it."

He became embarrassed, and made a slight bow without speaking. Evidently he was not accustomed to compliments.

"You have helped us so greatly in all our arrangements," I said.

"How about the chimney in the other room?" he asked, leaning back; "does it smoke yet?"

"No, I thank you; it seems to be all right now."

Lotta gave her easel a slight push back; she

was always impatient when household matters were discussed.

“What are you painting now, Fräulein von Werthern?” inquired our guest, as he rose to inspect the work on her easel.

“A glacier,” she answered.

“Why do you not take some subject in our immediate neighborhood—the old Stettenburg, for example, which frowns so defiantly from her steep rocks?”

“I paint what pleases me; it is all a matter of taste,” she answered rudely, with a slight curl of the upper lip.

“What do you do with all these pictures you paint?” he asked coolly.

Her color became a deep red and she gave him an angry glance.

But he did not seem to perceive it; he glanced quickly at the walls, which were richly decorated with Lotta’s works.

“Ah!” he said, “what a quantity, almost as many as there are yonder in the rooms of Prince Otto.”

“Are there fine pictures over there?” Lotta asked, in an altered tone.

“I am no judge myself,” said Fritz Roden, taking his seat again; “but I once heard a very fine painter from Düsseldorf say—and he was no

doubt a judge—that there were three or four very fine ones, but that the rest did not amount to much. There are so many amateurs' pictures in the collection. Prince Otto himself painted some of them during the two years he spent here,—was obliged to spend here, in fact.”

“Who is this Prince Otto?” asked my grandmother.

“He is the youngest son of our reigning prince, and the favorite of his ducal mamma; otherwise he is to a certain extent the terror of our neighborhood.”

“What is the reason of that?” Lotta was greatly interested now.

Fritz Roden did not pay any attention to this question, and changed the subject by asking my grandmother how she liked the pastor.

Lotta sat quite still and gazed at the windows of the castle opposite, behind which the rich hangings glistened.

“Are those the rooms?” she asked, interrupting our conversation.

“What rooms do you mean?” he asked, “those where the pictures hang?”

“Yes, I miss the Berlin gallery greatly, for I could always copy there,” and Lotta rose suddenly from her seat.

“Why do you not paint from nature, Fräulein

von Werthern? You do not know how many picturesque views there are in this region; and few of them have been transferred to canvas as yet."

She shook her beautiful head.

"I prefer to copy. I wonder—if I should be allowed to see those pictures just once?"

"Certainly! The castle is open. If you desire, I will go across with you at any time."

"Yes, indeed! Let us go immediately," she answered with animation.

"Immediately?" he said, smiling; "it is now three o'clock, and will soon be dark."

"I beg you, let us go at once," and she went quickly into the adjoining room and returned soon, with her wrap thrown over her shoulders, and a scarf on her head.

"Now I am ready," she said gayly.

"Will you not accompany us?" asked Fritz, as he held the door open to allow my sister to pass out.

"Not this time, thank you," I said, "but I will prepare the supper. Will you not return and sup with us?"

"I shall not have time to-night, Fräulein Helena," he answered cordially. "I will come in another time, perhaps to-morrow or the day after. Farewell."

They went away, and I took up my basket of

keys, and went into the small room that had been placed at our disposal for a kitchen. I realized suddenly that I was in a very disagreeable frame of mind. For years I had been accustomed to be little considered, but to-day for the first time something within me rebelled. I would have given much—God knows—to have been able to throw my bunch of keys at another's feet, and have said to her: "Now you can toil and moil with the prose of life; you can make the coffee and cut the bread; I have no time, I must away with my friends!"

The little room was still as death; only the kitchen clock continued its regular ticking and admonished me of my duty.

The tears which I could not keep back rushed into my eyes and fell upon the brown coat of the hare which lay on our kitchen table. Aimlessly I stroked its soft fur, for I knew Fritz Roden had laid it there. Scarcely a day passed in which I did not have a similar surprise; sometimes it was game, sometimes fowl, sometimes delicious fresh butter. But to-day it seemed to me like an insult, and I felt like throwing the poor dead animal out of the window.

"It is revolting," I said aloud, "this obtrusive charity." And I ill-naturedly took up the poor object of my wrath, to hang it in a cool place,

and there in the mouth of the little lifeless animal was a red rose. I could not help being amused, and, as I laughed, I realized how silly I had been, and quickly overcame my spiteful feelings. So I took the rose and put it carefully in water, and after a while I pinned it on my black dress and went in to my grandmother, who noticed it at once.

“Ah, ha, Helena!” And as my face crimsoned, she added teasingly: “You have already made a conquest of his mother: I dare tell it to you, for it will not make you vain, Helena. My God, it would be great good fortune.”

“Ah, grandmother,” I stammered, breathless.

“I am very tired, child,” she began again, and stretched out her hand to me. “Now that all is over, I know that the excitement and the sorrow have been too much for me in my last years. Ah, Helena, it would be great good fortune,” she repeated.

Then she nodded across at a wide-open window in the castle. There stood our little princess and playfully threw kisses at us; behind her we could see the smiling face of Fritz Roden.

“She is very beautiful, our Lotta,” said the old lady. “I think she becomes more beautiful every day.” And then, fearful of wounding me, she turned to me and said: “Beauty has many

advantages, Helena, and yet"—here she stroked my hair softly with her hands, "and yet she is no more to be envied than you."

I kissed her dear hands, I did not begrudge Lotta a single charm.

October passed quickly, and the last of November was upon us, with its disagreeable, dark, misty days, its storms and its rain. In Berlin such weather was not unusual in the late autumn; but the gas-lighted streets, the heavy shutters on the houses, and the protection the great mass of buildings gave to one another, all prevented our feeling so keenly the severe weather; we had never known how the storms came rushing down from the mountains and roared around an isolated house. In the city no high trees moan and sob in front of the windows, and on bleak nights no owl hoots from the steep-roofed gables.

There are no ghost stories, no spirits that walk about on stormy nights. In Berlin all had been matter-of-fact and commonplace. But to me there was poetry here in every nook. The wind sang its wild songs, and I often lay awake far into the night listening to it, and thinking of the old stories and legends which Frau Roden had told us about Rotenberg, when she had come in



at twilight for a little chat with her dear, dear Frau von Werthern.

We took walks in the woods near by with Fritz Roden, and he showed us the place where an old castle had formerly stood ; but now a group of blackthorn bushes grew on the mossy ground.

The woods were very still in their winter sleep ; only the withered leaves rustled beneath our feet, and sometimes a crow flew upward, screaming ; but nothing else disturbed the perfect quiet.

Whenever we came to the fir-trees, with their keen, fresh odor, I was reminded of my childhood, and remembered with what ecstasy I had greeted just such trees on many a Christmas eve. And Fritz would often tell us, in his simple, honest manner, of the time when he, with his brothers and comrades, had made here a knight's fortress and there a robber's cave, or had hunted the squirrels and gathered nuts ; and how, when evening came, they would go home with red cheeks and terrible appetites. Fritz said to this day no apple tasted as sweet to him as one of the pippins from his mother's cellar.

We were much together,—indeed, daily.

It was settled that we were to dine every Sunday at the Rodens'. We must also help to eat every Martlemas goose that was killed, and assist

at the breakfast after a slaughtering. It was very delightful to me, so—homelike that I could think of nothing more charming. How the wind seemed to carry my feet as I went to the dear old lady ; and she would ask my advice and question me as to whether I was interested in this or in that. And then she would stroke my cheeks and say : “ I like to see such color ; our air is certainly better than that in Berlin.”

“ Ah, a thousand times better,” I answered, as I followed the dear old soul around, much as Schnips followed Lotta. Sometimes, in the evenings, Lotta and I would play duets ; the mother and son would listen devoutly, and Frau Roden would tell us of the songs of her youth, and how fond she had been of singing “ From the Alps Resounds the Horn ;” and often Lotta would forget her high and mighty manner and laugh as heartily as any of us.

Yes, those were happy days, in spite of the care which had followed us from Berlin into our modest little home, and the small income upon which we were obliged to live. I was often forced to go begging to my grandmother with empty hands.

“ Helena, Helena, we are living too well,” she said. “ You must provide a simpler table.” A simpler table !

Grandmother's sight—thank God—was poor ; she did not see how often Lotta's lip curled over our "Lenten diet," as she called it. I was always careful to give her the best the table offered ; but she grew more capricious in her temper every day,—nothing pleased her.

To me it was always spring, each day seemed as bright and warm as May. There comes a time in every life when there is just such brightness, and every day is a festival. For the same familiar steps sounded frequently upon the stair, and when he came in the room it seemed to be flooded with sunshine.

"It was a great, great piece of good fortune," grandmother's eyes said constantly, as the care-worn old lady leaned back in her easy-chair at the window.

It was the first of December when I came back from the village with Frau Roden, who had already been making a few purchases for Christmas. Wherever we went we were received with a respect which bordered on reverence. The whole existence of this woman was so fresh-hearted, so healthy, so comfortable ; she never gave to any one more than belonged to him, but she was always so just to the people round about, and always knew the right thing to say.

"Now we will go home," said Frau Roden at

last, as we stepped out of the butcher's large shop. "Positively, child, there is snow—these are the first flakes."

The air was indeed filled with the great white stars, some of which were finding a resting-place on the black ostrich plumes of Frau Roden's bonnet.

"Now, dear child," continued the old lady as we turned our faces homeward; "Fritz has been telling me how beautifully your little Lotta paints. Why could she not turn her talent to some account, in order to help you?"

I stared at the speaker stupidly.

"I mean, sell the pictures," she explained.

"Lotta paint for money? Never!" I said emphatically.

"So? Never?—Well, you are harassed with work, while the little princess dabbles in colors at her pleasure. You are doing wrong."

"Ah, but Lotta is so peculiar," I said apologetically.

"Peculiar! Is she? Well, then, what will she do when you marry?"

She looked at me so steadily that I felt embarrassed.

"Oh—I?" I stammered.

"Yes; do you not think there are many men who would like to possess so sensible a girl as

you? What would a man want with such a spoiled doll as Lotta is? Good Heaven, what would I do if such a little princess were to come into my house? I should at once declare that my Fritz had lost his reason. Just imagine! she rises at nine o'clock, and spends her whole day in painting, and playing with her dog. She never thinks of giving him anything to eat, but she fondles him by the hour. No, dear child, God preserve every upright man from such a wife. She is your sister, certainly—but here we are home again. Listen, dear Helena, it is my habit always to have punch and roast apples the evening the first snow appears. And I want your grandmother and Lotta and you to spend this first evening of winter with us. And give Frau von Werthern my greeting."

We were standing at her door, and I now said "Good-by."

"Good-by," she said, and gave me a friendly nod as she gathered her long silk mantle around her and went up the steps; and as I entered the garden I turned around for one last look, and saw her still standing there, and her son with her. They both looked after me with a friendly nod.

The old lady's words had moved me deeply; they came to me like a message from another

world ; and while I walked under the bare trees toward our dwelling, the thought which up to this time I had with difficulty suppressed, took possession of my heart with irresistible force.

I saw myself in the house yonder, before which I had just been standing : I went through all the rooms ; and I knew I had a right to be there, a sweet, holy right. I said "Mother" to a dear old lady. I stood by her side—by his side. From the moment of our first meeting my heart had turned to him. I, who had never had a love passion and who had long believed myself beyond all such youthful follies, was taken captive by the earnest eyes and the still, quiet manner of Fritz Roden. And to-day—had not his own mother said that I indeed might please a man, might make him happy ? The warm blood rushed to my cheeks, and I sat down, almost dazed, on a stone seat under one of the lindens, and looked with burning eyes across at the gables of the great house.

Ah, "her sister !" The Cinderella might be pardoned for hoping, as countless women had done before her, that happiness would come to her too, if the man to whom her heart belonged would choose her and lead her to a home of comfort, peace, and joy.

"Ah, no, no ! for God's sake do not think of

it; do not," something within me whispered; "the awakening would be too fearful."

"But I love him," whispered my heart; "nothing can alter that; I love him and shall always be true to him. I love his just, unchangeable nature, love him for his great, warm heart and old-time dignity,—I love Fritz Roden." And I sprang up from the bench with glowing cheeks, and hastened on through the fresh-fallen snow, as though fleeing from myself, until I stood with fluttering heart at my own door.

Within, I heard a strange, sharply accentuated voice. As I entered, the small, dark daughter of the keeper of the chateau rose and bowed. A pair of gleaming, eager eyes looked out at me like stars from beneath their long, dark lashes.

These eyes were not faded, and were the only youthful part of the small, pale countenance whose sharp features must once have been extremely beautiful.

Lotta came to meet me with a joyful cry. Fräulein Anita had brought to her permission from the court chamberlain to copy at the castle whenever she desired.

"At the castle?" I said uneasily. "Will they not intrust a picture to my sister that she may paint here?"



"I am very sorry," said Anita, "but that would not be allowed."

"But the rooms are cold," I ventured to demur.

"I am authorized to heat them," she answered quietly.

"You will be afraid, little princess," I said jestingly; "for perhaps there is a white lady haunting the rooms over there; think if you were alone——"

"I will take the liberty to remain in the adjoining room," interrupted her small, dark visitor.

I remembered suddenly the words of Frau Roden: "She is no companion for you, child."

"And I will take the liberty of accompanying my sister," I said, as I looked at Anita, whose eyes seemed to attempt to penetrate into my very soul, as if she would ask:

"Who has told you about me, or my past? What do you know of human love and hate and passion?"

But she only said, "As you will," made me a slight bow, and wished us, after an absent-minded fashion, an Italian *a rivederci*, and was gone.



## CHAPTER IV.

“LITTLE PRINCESS,” I said to Lotta, who stood with sparkling eyes before her easel, “I think it is hardly the thing for you to go over there to paint.”

“Because you begrudge me the most trifling diversion,” said Lotta, as her beautiful face became pale. “Because you do not at all understand how I smother and suffer in this seclusion, in this hiding-place,—neither you nor grandmother nor any one else. You cannot conceive what I endure. You cook and bake and are highly delighted if you make a good pudding, and I—oh, I stifle!”

And she sank upon a chair, and began weeping so bitterly that grandmother came out frightened from her own room.

“Why, Lotta!” was all she said.

But Lotta had worked herself into a passion; she raised her tear-stained face, and the words fairly streamed from her mouth. “What is our life here? We rise early, and then spend our evenings sleeping, and in between times one long,

endless span of weariness. And what do I hear? Helena's ceaseless questions about the house-keeping expenses, or a chapter from Scott or Frederika Bremer. Who comes to see us? The sober wiseacre, who—oh, how I hate him, this village bear!—or do you think it is a pleasure for me to see that egregious pedant from across the garden coming in, in his top-boots, to drink a cup of coffee or take a walk with us? What is there to see in this town? What do I care that the pastor lives yonder, and the bürgermeister here, or that Martin Luther compared this handful of red roofs amid the trees to a dish of boiled lobster dressed with parsley? Do you think it any pleasure to me to listen to that preacher on Sundays with no teeth in his mouth?—it's enough to bring sinful thoughts into one's head to hear him. Or to admire the countrified toilets of the Rotenberg fine dames? Surely not. Oh, I hate this crow's nest, this owl's retreat, until I am nearly driven to despair. And now I am not to be permitted to go to the castle, because that woman has a history. Can that injure me? Am I, then, a child?"

And she stopped for lack of breath.

"Ah, little princess," I begged anxiously.

"Let me do as I please," she threatened, "or I shall do something desperate."

“Well, well, you little fury,” said our grandmother, smiling, “what would you do, for example?”

“Oh, there are many things possible,” said the girl crossly. “Think how Erna von Wallinitz married a beer-brewer out of despair.”

I laughed heartily at this, but my grandmother answered, half earnestly, “She made a respectable match; he is an honest, intelligent man.”

Lotta shrugged her shoulders.

“You will not prevent my going over there,” she asked, half commandingly, half questioningly, “or——”

“Or you will marry a beer-brewer,” said my grandmother jestingly, as she took up her knitting again.

“Oh, there is also the gawky agriculturist,” murmured Lotta, and she threw a glance at me that seemed to strike to my very heart. Suddenly she flew to me and threw her arms around my neck. “No, Helena, that is impossible! that is impossible!” And she laughed.

“What do you mean?” I asked severely, as she laid her inconsiderate hand on my heart’s secret.

“What do I mean? What a dissembler you are, after all, Helena.” And she laughed merrily.

"But, never mind, sister mine, you shall not be teased."

I had told grandmother and Lotta of our invitation to the roast-apple feast.

My grandmother was not well enough to go, and Lotta had no desire.

"It is such a bore," she sighed. "I beg you to spare me these heathenish rites and solemn discourses. You can listen to it all, Helena, and eat the roast apples for me."

"And how will you spend the evening?"

"Sleeping," she laughed, "what else? I wish you much pleasure, sister Helena, and present my compliments to your——"

"Lotta!" I said sharply.

"Well, good-night," she said, yawning, as she threw herself upon the sofa and took up a book.

I stood for a while before the mirror in my bedroom and studied my face; had I then no beauty whatever?

"Too much color," my grandmother had always said. "Her hair has no distinct shade at all," my stepmother had once remarked.

Certainly I was not at all like Lotta: but no one could be as beautiful as she. I smoothed back my simply arranged hair and felt the thick knot at the back, then I fastened on my cloak, sighing. What maiden is beautiful enough in

her own eyes when she wants to please her lover ?

It was already late, and I hastened through the garden and across the court ; the December wind howled dismally through the high trees, and hastened my footsteps ; I went quickly into the vestibule, and could scarcely shut the door.

“ Here you are ! ” said Frau Roden, “ all alone, through the night and wind. ”

And she led me kindly into the warm, bright sitting-room, where upon the snow-white covered table were the punch glasses, the spice cake, and the fine large roasted apples.

I made my excuses for my sister as best I could.

“ Just say Lotta would not come, dear child. Always be honest ! Had I invited her to a box in the theatre at Berlin instead of my own sitting-room here, she would have been well enough to go. Well, I thank you all the more for coming. ”

I looked at her in surprise. Upon her face was a deep flush, and the manner in which she rattled the platter and glasses, and then sat down in the corner of the sofa, knitting rapidly, had an energy and haste about it that was foreign to her.

“ Sit down, my good child ; my son will be in immediately. ”

And she drew me down beside her on the sofa.

“Are you not well, Frau Roden?” I asked, for her hands were trembling.

“Well enough,” she answered, “but—I cannot tell you. We think we are swimming on a sea as clear as glass, and forget that there are storms, —and lo ! there blows a hurricane in our faces ; as if an ocean without waves, a life without strife, were possible. But when the storms come from the side,”—she broke off, and was silent for some time. Then she began again : “The experience we gather in our life’s journey we would willingly give to our children. We would gladly stand by their side with counsel and aid ; but youth will go its own way, throwing the gathered gold to the four winds, and then seeking with much trouble and disappointment fresh nuggets which have never been tested in the crucible.

“It has to be,” she continued, “but I feel unspeakably sorry for him, for her, and for us all.

“There he comes,” she added, sitting erect, and trying to control herself, while I felt my heart throb as if it would burst.

The next moment he was in the room.

“Alone ?” was his first question, as he gave me his hand.



“The little princess had something better to do,” said his mother.

He seated himself silently, but his face was dark.

Several minutes passed, during which no word broke the painful silence. At last he rose, rang, and ordered the punch to be brought in, then filled the glasses and passed them to us. Then he reached his right hand across the table to his mother, and looked at her with a supplicating glance.

She began knitting rapidly again, but from her mild blue eyes I saw the tears fall upon her work. “Mother!” he said beseechingly.

Then she leaned across the table and whispered something in his ear. I did not hear what it was, but I caught a few words, whose significance I did not then understand.

“The other, Fritz, the other!”

He shook his head.

“The other!” she begged once more.

But he did not stir; his hand, however, still lay on the tablecloth, waiting to grasp his mother’s.

“Let us talk it over to-morrow, Fritz,” she said, greatly agitated, as she seated herself again.

He remained inflexible.

“Give me your hand,” he begged; “it cannot be otherwise, never!”

She laid her hand in his for a moment, then hastily raised her handkerchief to her eyes and left the room sobbing, and we were alone. We could hear the wind rattling the wooden shutters, and moaning through the leafless tops of the chestnut-trees ; here within was light and warmth and two young throbbing hearts ; he and I, just as I had pictured it a thousand times. He took his glass and pushed mine toward me.

“Drink your punch, Helena,” he said inattentively.

Our eyes met for a moment, he looking like one intoxicated.

“Helena,” he began hesitatingly, and with a sound in his voice that made me lean my head back, almost breathless with happiness ! “Helena, let us be honest toward one another.”

“Surely !” I said.

He rose, and began to walk up and down the room.

“Why did not Lotta come ?” he said abruptly, stopping before me.

As I glanced at him, the intense look on his face embarrassed me.

“She—I believe—she is not well,” I stammered.

He turned away, and began again striding rapidly up and down the room. At last he came

back, sat down opposite to me, and seized my hands. But he let them fall immediately, as his mother at this moment entered the room.

“I will see you later,” he muttered, and went out.

“You wonder what has come over us all,” began my hostess. “I may as well tell you at once, for it concerns you too. Fritz—are you ill?” she asked anxiously.

“Ah, Helena, I had wished it otherwise, my dear child; you must know that Fritz loves your sister!”

Presence of mind in distress was a trait that had come to me from my father. The presage of happiness had made me feel so weak I had nearly fainted; now I turned calmly toward the tear-stained face that was regarding me so anxiously. She took my hand, thinking from my fixed stare that I was astounded.

“Ah, you are surprised, dear heart,” she continued, as the tears still fell on her cheeks. “I was also surprised when I heard it. We were standing on the steps, looking after you to-day, and I said—why may I not tell you?—‘Fritz, that is a girl after my own heart.’ Then he became pale, and turned suddenly and left me. But when I was resting in my easy-chair between five and six o’clock, taking my twilight nap, he

came in and sat down on a stool at my feet, as had been his habit when a child, but not of late years, and then—but love makes fools of the most rational. She has certainly turned his brain. From the first moment that he had set eyes on Lotta, he had been resolved, he told me. When she threw back the veil from her travelling hat, he had been dazzled by her beauty. At first he said she would be no suitable wife for him,—it would be madness ; but now he sees clearly that life would be nothing without her. Ah, child, what can a distressed mother do ? If she should bring the stars down from the heavens and lay them at his feet, he would yet want the one thing—the girl he loved. Ah, I know how it will end ; he will be unhappy, very unhappy ; but he will not be advised.”

“ Do you believe that Lotta returns his affection ? ” I asked quietly.

“ No ! But what does that matter ? She will become his wife for—his money.”

I was silent. Lotta’s words came into my mind : “ It is so dreadful to be poor ! ”

“ I must go home,” I said, and rose. I felt almost suffocated. Frau Roden dried her eyes and helped me on with my cloak.

“ Dear, good child,” she said, and patted me on the cheeks, “ I have loved you dearly ; we

will hold together ; I have had a presentiment that with your family a change would come into my life—but this is not the change I looked forward to.”

As I entered the hall, I saw Fritz Roden standing there with his coat and hat on.

“I will accompany you,” he said, and we went out together. The wind had gone down, and, looking up through the leafless branches of the trees, we could see the moon in its splendor, peeping out from beneath the dark clouds. A deathly stillness reigned over the house and garden, an unspeakable anguish was in my heart. I went on quickly ; only to be alone with my torturing pain ! Only to be alone !

“Helena,” he began, “you know all. Are you angry with me ?”

Angry that he loved Lotta ! This one question showed me my error, my foolish hopes, in a glaring light. Love me, notice me, when she was near ! “No, certainly not,” I answered bitterly.

“Will you speak to her for me ?” he asked.

And as I remained silent, he begged me urgently. “I cannot do it, Helena. When she looks at me from under her long lashes, it’s all up with me. I am diffident and awkward ; you tell her how much I love her, and that I will fulfil her every wish ; she shall never stumble over

the rough places in this life ; I will take her in my arms and carry her over them all—over them all—over them all, Helena.”

He had seized my hand and forced me to stop. The moon was shining down full into his face, and I saw his earnest, loving eyes, and saw, too, how his mouth twitched nervously. And once more he repeated earnestly :

“Over them all, Helena !”

“I will do what I can,” I said, scarcely capable of speech.

“Ah, thank you, Helena, thank you !” he cried, seizing my right hand. “If you knew what sleepless nights I have passed on her account, what a martyrdom I have lived through since I first saw her ! A hundred times was I on the way to reveal my secret to you ; she loves you so tenderly.”

“I must go home,” I stammered, trying to free my hand from his, but he held it the more tightly.

“Do not let me wait too long for an answer,” he begged ; “speak to Lotta soon,—to-night if possible,” and he trembled as he spoke. “I am not such an impatient man, Helena, but this suspense grates on every nerve. I am like a man on the rack. You will speak to her immediately, will you not ?”

“And if Lotta does not return your love?”

He stared at me. “That is not possible: This affection cannot be one-sided; it is too strong, too earnest and true, Helena!”

I must have laughed bitterly at this, for he looked suspiciously in my face. “What I say has a presumptuous sound, has it not?” he continued, “but I believe—I am almost sure, in fact that Lotta is not indifferent to me. You have never thought about it at all, Helena; only a lover’s heart can discover when his passion is returned. But go now, and be my good angel!”

He pressed my hand again. “To-morrow, early, send me a single line; good-night!”

I groped my way up the dark steps; but my feet suddenly refused to do me further service, so I sat down on a stair and tried to become master of my storm-tossed thoughts. My first thought was one of shame and intense mortification. What could have possessed me, vain, presumptuous, foolish creature that I was? Each day since coming to this place did I live over again every meeting with him, and I could find no moment when he had given me reason to believe he loved me. To Lotta he had come, with Lotta he had gone, for Lotta only he had had eyes; I had only been looked upon as “her sister,” as



the guardian or nurse of the little princess. Ah, Lotta, I begrudge you no happiness ; only not this—only not this ! And now I must go in and speak with her. As if Fate had not made the drink bitter enough for me. What had I done that God took from me all the roses, and left me only the thorns ?

So I sat in the cold upon the steps, with my feet like ice, and my head and the palms of my hands burning. I was almost strangled with shame and anger, but could neither find tears nor words to comfort myself.

Why had I come here ? Why ? At last I rose, feeling stiff in all my limbs, and went in through the family room to our bedchamber. A lamp which was suspended from the centre of the ceiling was burning. Lotta could not sleep without a light, and she had saved this one by tears and pleadings from the Berlin auction-rooms. It threw a rosy glow through its delicate Bohemian glass shade upon the frescoes and stucco garlands on the wall and upon my mother's furniture. All was noiseless within, and Lotta was sleeping ; she lay on her white pillow, and the hair, which I did not braid this evening, was tumbled back in a confused mass. She breathed so softly that one could hardly be sure there was life in the beautiful creature.

I sat down on the bed beside her, still looking at her intently, and an uneasy feeling came upon me as I looked. She seemed so helpless in her sleep, and there was a drawn look around her mouth that was seldom seen there; there was a something in her countenance that disturbed me, disturbed me against my will. She could not help being attractive; could not prevent the "bear" falling hopelessly in love with her. For in every fairy tale the beast falls in love with the beauty. It was her destiny, her fate—she dare not scorn it!

And he? No! I whispered, and knelt by the sleeping girl. No one had done me any wrong. I alone was to blame. And then the hot tears came, and, as I tried to stifle my sobs, a half cry broke from me.

Lotta was awakened suddenly from her sleep, and looked toward me, while I put my handkerchief in my mouth and forced myself to appear composed.

"For God's sake, Helena, what has happened?" she cried, trying to straighten her disordered hair.

"Nothing, Lotta, nothing; only a message I have for you; but first be quiet."

"A message? Haven't you been crying?" she queried.

“Now listen very attentively, little princess, and let me speak.”

“That sounds very solemn, Helena.”

“It is something very serious, Lotta.”

She grew a little uneasy now.

“Well, go on, speak out,” she said.

“Fritz Roden loves you, Lotta, and wishes to make you his wife.”

Lotta gave me one glance, and then threw herself back on her pillow and began laughing; she laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks; the merriment came from her very heart. I have never heard any other laugh as contagious and as hearty as Lotta's. I threw my arms around her and laughed too, although my heart was breaking, and mine was a sad laugh.

“Oh, I shall die!” she cried at last, drying her eyes.

“Did you not know that he loved you? Did you never perceive it?” I asked, almost afraid of the answer.

“Oh, of course! He fell in love with me the first day he saw me. One had to be blind not to see that. But that he wanted to marry me,—that is so—so—” and again she broke into a hearty laugh.

“But it is no laughing matter,” I said, provoked, and shook her by the shoulders. “Lotta, be serious for once, I pray you.”

Then she became quiet and looked at me.

“What do you want me to say?” she asked.

“Do you not love him, little princess, not even a little?” I questioned. “Do, for heaven’s sake, be earnest! It is not a rose that you are offered, it is a true heart, the unconditional confidence and trust of an honest, good man.”

“Ah! do not become sentimental,” she said sulkily.

“Lotta,” I begged, “that is no answer. I only want you to consider it well. I would not speak with you at all, only I know he loves you well—only as a good man can love a woman—and that you will love him, must love him, in return, for he is unquestionably good——”

“Ah, bah! that is sheer nonsense, Helena; go to sleep,” she interrupted.

“No, no, Lotta; promise me that you, if you become affianced to him, will do all in your power to return his love; become his wife with this purpose in view, Lotta, or else give him an honest No! He may not be very miserable.”

“How tragic!” she said. “Now let me go asleep. I am tired and have had enough to think of to-day since grandmother ordered me to be more considerate.”

She threw her arms around my neck and gave me a kiss, and, before I was ready to retire, was sound asleep again.

Poor Fritz !

I shed no more tears that night, and toward morning I fell into an uneasy sleep, dreamless but heavy. When I wakened grandmother was by my bed.

“Are you ill, Helena? For God’s sake do not get ill !”

“I am quite well,” I answered, as the memory of yesterday came slowly back to me. “I will rise immediately.”

“I heard you moaning,” she answered. “I have been awake a long time. Helena, I want to speak to you—is she sleeping?” and the old lady pointed toward Lotta’s bed.

“Yes, she never wakes until eight o’clock.”

“Do not be startled, Helena; I have had a letter from Hans,” whispered grandmother.

“How is he? What is he doing—what does he say about papa’s death?” I asked.

Grandmother shook her head, and smoothed her white hair nervously with her hands, and whispered to me :

“Badly, Helena; the letter was very sad. He has been very ill and needed money, and no inconsiderable sum.”

“ Ill ! Ah, grandmamma, and we have nothing ! ”

“ No, we have nothing,” she repeated. “ I cannot help him, and if he gets worse and dies, as he threatens—well, he must grow worse and die ; I can do nothing.”

I did not answer. I knew that she was right.

“ Please do not say anything to Lotta about it ; you know how devoted she is to him. And she will not see it as we do, nor will she understand that the money is all gone.”

“ Will you answer his letter, grandmamma ? ”

“ No,” she responded.

“ How much does Hans want ? ”

“ Eight hundred thalers. He has an opportunity to engage in some business from which he hopes to make great profits. I would willingly grant this last request, but ”—and she shrugged her shoulders—“ where am I to get it ? You must try and influence Lotta if you can ; last evening she was almost unreasonable ; she does not seem to understand that we have given up our luxurious life because we were forced to do so. She came to me with a lengthy order she had written to a Düsseldorf firm for artists’ materials, amounting to almost ten thalers. I tore the letter in two. Then she cried as if the direst misfortune had come to pass. With Hans’s un-

happy letter I also received another, a bill from Gerson for a new black costume which Lotta had ordered, and which is to come to-day. It is certainly not necessary for Rotenberg : I do not see how it is to be paid."

She arose wearily and turned and went out.

There are days when one knows it will not be clear : times when one almost believes the sun will never shine again, and when our very existence lies as a burden on our souls.

I rose and dressed myself quickly. I heard the old servant moving about in the kitchen ; soon she came into the next room, and I heard her voice.

"Fräulein ! Fräulein Helena !"

What did she want ? Then I remembered the word that Fritz Roden wanted, the word for which he had begged ; but I had no word for him.

Cautiously I went over to Lotta's bed ; she reached out her small hand and caught the fold of my dress.

"Helena, one moment," she begged, in a weak voice.

"What is it, Lotta ?"

"Helena, I have had such fearful dreams, though of course that is nothing very unusual ; I want to ask you a question. Do you consider



Fritz Roden a good character? Answer honestly, Helena, you know what I mean—generous, in no way narrow or egotistical, a gentleman?”

“O God, Lotta, do not ask me!” I begged. “I consider him one of the best men in the world!”

“But answer me! Do you believe he is a gentleman?”

“Yes, I do believe it,” I murmured.

She was silent, but looked up at me with a face as white as the linen on which it rested, and with an earnest, frightened expression.

“Well, let him come,” she said, almost despairingly.

“You will accept him?” I stammered. “Lotta, do you really love him? Otherwise—my God, Lotta——”

“I will accept him,” sounded back from the pillow in a half-smothered tone.

Almost dazed I stepped into the next room.

The woman was still standing waiting for the money to buy milk and rolls. I tore a leaf out of my account-book, and wrote “Yes” on it. Then I folded it and addressed it.

“Go up to the great house and give that to Herr Roden, but to no one but himself.”

She gave me a sly look and went, but at the door she turned around.

“Then what the people say is true,” she began. “Ah, I will not speak of it, Fräulein von Werthern.”

“Of what?”

“That you are Fritz Roden’s sweetheart! But it must be true, he gets a good wife. When you are married, I shall go to the church. You may not believe it, Fräulein, but he would not take every one; a great many fine girls have run after him. But the Rodens have always kept themselves apart. Ah, do not blame me for speaking, Fräulein; I shall go at once.”

She went. I had no word of blame for the stupid creature. I covered my face with my hands. I Fritz Roden’s sweetheart! Ah, great God!

At eleven o’clock everything was in readiness for the lover’s reception. My grandmother sat in her accustomed easy-chair in her black silk gown, with her knitting in her hand, but she made no pretence of work, I noticed; the unexpected news that Fritz Roden and Charlotte von Werthern were betrothed seemed to bewilder her. “Did he mean Lotta? Are you sure he really meant Lotta?”—she had already asked me several times.

“Yes, dearest grandmamma.”

“And she will have him? Lotta, you are going to marry Fritz Roden?”

“Yes,” came the answer more than once from the white lips of the girl. She stood with listless arms at the large stove; she had something thrown around her shoulders, and looked chilly and pale and singular. The luxuriant hair that had always hung down her back was fastened up to-day on her head, and gave one the impression that she was years older than she really was, and yet she was startlingly beautiful, more beautiful than I had ever seen her before.

When the well-known step sounded outside, she shivered and became pale almost to lividness; she seemed as if she wanted to escape; then she fixed her wandering glance upon a picture which hung over the sofa—Hans in full uniform; a finely finished photograph, that I had purchased with the limited pocket money I had received. She was nervous and agitated, one could see at a glance.

My grandmother went to the door when she heard the knock, and opened it herself. As she did so, I went into my own room and shut the door behind me, to hear nothing—to see nothing—only to be alone with my deadly sorrow. Could it be possible that one could endure such agony and not die? So I stood and heard the voices, that sounded muffled and indistinct on my ear, heard the agitation in the voice that had yester-

day been so full of anguish, saw his face before me so earnest and quivering with emotion. I nervously clutched the handle of the balcony door, and looked out at the dreary wintry landscape with desolation in my heart, and no hope to which to cling.

A light step sounded behind me, and Lotta sank suddenly in a chair by my side. She did not look like a joyous bride.

"Come with me," she whispered, and grasped my hand. "I am going to his mother."

She looked at me so piteously that I could not do otherwise than consent.

We took our hats and cloaks and went out together into the living-room. He was holding my grandmother's hands and talking to her. His happiness had made him talkative.

He was assuring her of his great love and of his thankfulness, and the old lady stroked his blond head, as she said, "I believe you, dear Herr Roden, I believe you."

I gave him my hand, but could not look at him. He whispered his heartfelt thanks to me, and then rose hurriedly.

"My mother is waiting," he said.

"Helena is coming with us," said Lotta, like an alarmed child.

He was silent ; he had hoped to go alone with

her, but she caught hold of the folds of my dress, and so we three set out on the now familiar path, the bare branches of the birch-trees drooping above us. He walked beside the slender figure, but her finger-tips scarcely rested on his arm; when they reached the court she drew her hand back.

“You had better go up the walk by yourself.”

“Let me have the joy of seeing you by my side,” he begged, drawing her arm once more within his. “Yonder is my mother standing at the window.”

So they crossed the court together, and Frau Roden came to the door to meet them when she saw them approaching. The tears were running down her cheeks as she held out both hands to Lotta. “God knows best,” she said, and drew the young girl to her heart.

And when we had followed her into the sitting-room, she repeated :

“God knows best. Oh, if you will but make my son happy, he is my all——”

She sank in her chair and began weeping loud and bitterly. Lotta stood opposite her, perfectly silent. She and we all felt that the old lady doubted her capability to make Fritz happy. The bridegroom-elect perceived this with bitterness.

“Mother!” he called sharply.

Then she dried her eyes, and tried to act as though all were well. She went to her escritoire and took from a small compartment a glistening ornament in the shape of a cross, and set with diamonds.

“This,” she said, the tears shining the while in her kindly eyes, “was given me by my dear husband on the day on which we were betrothed. It is for you now. May it adorn as happy and contented a bride as was I when first I wore it.”

The beautiful girl held the glittering cross in her hand without the slightest sign of emotion; then she leaned over and kissed the donor, and murmured some words of thanks.

Fritz Roden now opened the door, and called through the hall with a lion’s voice:

“Here, my people! Mamselle, Rieke, Mina! Come here, all of you!”

And the whole household soon appeared, even to the last kitchen maid and the coachman and the stable-boy. Fritz put his arms around Lotta’s waist and drew her to him.

“Here, my dear bride, are your people! Tomorrow you can have a holiday in honor of our betrothal. You, Mamselle, can arrange for it. Ah, David, come here, and give me your hand. The first time she and I ever saw each other, you were

driving us. You brought the bride here, and you shall drive us to our wedding. Shall he not, little Lotta?"

I wondered whether she thought of that first evening, and of the spiteful comments she had made. She stared above the heads of the people into the empty air, and a deep flush overspread her face. She seemed to answer with a slight bend of the head, and turned away quickly. So Fritz Roden had to take all the handshakings and congratulations upon himself, while she stood with tightly compressed lips at the window. In her bearing there was something of impatience, as if she would throw a burden from her shoulders.







## CHAPTER V.

Two weeks had passed since the betrothal. A wonderfully short time! But it lay like lead upon all our hearts; the only sunbeam to be found was in Fritz Roden's eyes. Every day at five o'clock he came up, and remained with us until evening. Generally he had a little package in his hand, or playfully hidden behind him, and he would hide it in Lotta's work-basket, or throw it unexpectedly into her lap.

There were odd gifts wrapped in these little parcels, such as only a man living in a little town would purchase: fancy writing-paper and painted envelopes; wonderful work-bags with useless scissors; and thimbles much too large for Lotta's finger; perfumes that were simply frightful, and time and again costly bouquets of fragrant violets; these last at least were appreciated.

I was sorely puzzled by Lotta's manner of receiving these gifts. She was always coolly gracious; but I often thought she would have thrown them out of the window before his very face had she dared.

She put them all together in a bureau drawer which she had emptied for that purpose.

She avoided his tender, loving glance persistently ; and his playful manner received from her but slight notice, and never any response.

She had certainly become very quiet lately, with so proud a manner that a lover less enthusiastic than Fritz Roden would have desponded. In these days she obtained, unperceived by him, such control over him that she managed him exactly as she had done the puppets in her theatre, when, as a child, she had pulled the silk cords at pleasure.

She never took his arm when we went for our walks, and gently but positively refused to make any calls upon the friends of the Rodens who lived in that vicinity, because she was in deep mourning. He let that pass. In fact she did as she had always done—as she pleased.

He came no more in top-boots, because she had expressed her distaste for them. He looked more like what he was, the owner and manager of a large estate ; and he left off wearing his gay-colored cravats, because she did not consider them seemly. In fact he humored her slightest whim, and seemed only to have one desire—to gratify her wishes before they were expressed.

Grandmother looked on apathetically. Dear

old lady ! she had altered greatly ; now that the excitement and tumult of the sad change she had been compelled to make was over, it was all the more noticeable. She was more silent than ever, and deeply absorbed in religious meditations.

Frau Roden came sometimes with her son, and then she went to grandmother's room, where they two talked over old times.

Fritz would sit down opposite Lotta, and I would sit alone at my sewing-table.

It was just before Christmas. A cold, rainy, disagreeable day. Lotta sat with clasped hands and looked out of the window ; her profile was turned toward her lover, and he was, as usual, lost in admiration as he gazed at her.

At last she turned from the window. "Is it not true, Fritz," she said, quite carelessly, "that you are a wealthy man?"

He started and laughed, and reached out his hand for hers. "Well, little princess, we will have enough to live on."

"I want to ask you something," she said, "but I do not wish Helena to hear."

I rose at once. "I will go and make the coffee," I said, smiling.

A quarter of an hour later I went into our sleeping-room and found that the door into the

adjoining room was open, and as I hastened to close it I heard Fritz say: "I will do anything you wish, Lotta, but not that; it would be most imprudent." After a while Lotta came into our room and went over to the mirror to arrange her hair. I saw that her hands trembled, and a dark, red color burned on her cheeks.

"Helena," she said, "we believed that at least he was a gentleman. We were mistaken." With a violent movement she opened the wardrobe door and took down her hat and coat. "I will be back soon," she said, "and in the mean time you can entertain my precious lover." And she was gone.

As I went hastily into the living-room, I found Fritz before the picture of Hans, looking at it with knitted brows.

"Where is Lotta?" he inquired.

"She has gone out. Did you not know it?"

"No." He appeared disturbed. "She is vexed with me," he said. "Do you where the obstinate child has gone?"

I shook my head. "She will be back soon," I said.

"Well, I will go out and find her," he said quietly, and went as he spoke. But he did not succeed, for she came back shortly and alone.

"Where have you been, Lotta?" I asked.

“Oh, just out—a short distance,” was the answer.

After a time Fritz Roden came back too. He carried, as always, a package in his hand, which he laid by Lotta's cup, and looked at her beseechingly. But, for the first time, no notice at all was taken of the little love gift; not once did she glance even inadvertently toward it, though it lay so close to her cup.

“Not cross, little princess?” he said at last, jestingly.

She gave him one look; it was a glance of unspeakable contempt. “Oh, no,” she said, “but I could not suffer you to be so imprudent. I will take nothing more.”

He laughed heartily. “Lotta,” he cried, “that was spoken like a wife whose husband had refused to grant her request. You maidens and wives are extravagant in your whims. But see, sweetheart, here are chocolates and dates, in these little *bonbonnières*.”

He had opened the package and held up before her the little silk bags.

“I am no child—I thank you,” she responded, and took a fresh cracker and bit it.

“Shall I go away?” he asked pleasantly.

“Pray do,” she responded with a graceful movement of her hand toward the door. It

seemed almost as though she were laughing. And that hurt him.

He sprang up. "Then farewell, for you are incorrigible."

She rose likewise. "Adieu!"

At the door he turned, anger and good humor each striving for mastery in his face. He came back, and raised her chin gently until he looked full in her face, and asked:

"Do we love each other, or not, Lotta?"

"I hardly consider it worth while to think about that," she answered coldly.

"Lotta!" he cried, shocked. But she went past him quickly into our sleeping-room. He stood silent for a few minutes, then went out, forgetting to say good-by.

To me the whole scene was altogether inexplicable. "Lotta," I said, as I went after her, "I do not desire to interfere in your affairs, but it was not right in you to send him away as you did."

"Oh, don't bother!" she said impatiently. She sat before the little stove, with her feet pressed against the iron projection, and the firelight playing over the daintily-fitting shoe. It had grown quite dark in the room, and I could not see her features or read their expression.

"Well, Lotta?" I said, after a time.

“I have believed that he would be an assistance to us,” she said, “have thought that he would be able to raise us above our trouble ; what it costs me to speak to him no one can understand. And what answer did he give me, after all his protestations of love, after his repeated assurances that my every wish should be to him as a command ?” And now she mimicked his voice and manner. “ ‘No, my child, you do not understand, and therefore do not ask me.’ God in heaven, Helena ! I have gone to him like a beggar, have humbled myself for the first time in my life—only to be repulsed.”

“But he is so prudent and sensible, little princess ; if he refused you something, you know it was for the best.”

“Oh, yes, very prudent,” she said with a sneer ; “but this reasoning is cold as ice, one freezes when one comes in contact with it. Give me impulsive, warm, impassioned deeds ; an act where the left hand knows not what is done by the right, one spark of magnanimity. You seek in vain for it in these creatures here, who live like moles in a mound. Ah, that my lot should be cast among such country bumpkins !”

“But tell me what it is all about.”

“Oh, you will not understand me. Hans needs money, must have money, or he is lost.”



“Great heavens !” I cried, “you have not been begging for Hans ?”

“Yes, for he has only me, and I love him best in the whole world. I overheard your conversation with grandmother on my betrothal morning, and—” she faltered—“I should have said nothing—not yet ; but last evening I received a letter from Hans, and I know well that he will be brought to great misery and ruin if something is not done—and done soon—to save him ; so”—and her voice became shrill—“so I went to him and begged him to assist Hans. And he—he got on his high horse ; spoke of what he would do for me, for all of us here ; but that he was not foolish enough to throw his money into the water, and that one would not serve Hans thus—only injure him ; for only misery, hunger, and sorrow could change such natures into respectable human beings. Oh, he spoke very well, very prudently, and very like a worthy bürgermeister ; but by so doing he removed the mask from his face, and I saw his true features ; a wretched, miserly, narrow man. He is thoroughly contemptible.”

“No,” I cried ; “Lotta, you exaggerate. No, believe me, he was right not to give Hans money. He would only gamble it away in an hour, as he did here. Have some respect for the man whose possessions are the result of work and fulfilment

of duty,—the money would only be thrown into a bottomless pit.”

She took the tongs and poked the glowing coals with them ; then she sprang up suddenly and began wringing her hands.

“ Helena, I believe I hate——”

She stopped abruptly, for there was a noise on the outer door.

I hastened into the next room and opened it, and found the coachman outside ; he held a note in his hand and smiled slyly.

“ For the young mistress,” said he.

I lit a lamp, and then took the letter to my sister. She scarcely knew whether to read it or not. She took it hesitatingly, opened the envelop, and drew the letter out. A postal order for one hundred thalers was folded inside, which Lotta evidently was expected to despatch.

She became pale as death, and hastily put the little strip of paper on a chest of drawers by which she stood.

“ Extraordinary generosity !” she muttered ironically.

After several minutes she read the letter and then handed it to me.

“ Not a sermon this time,” she said, and turned away.

This is what Fritz Roden had written :

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“ I cannot be happy, dearest, knowing that you are sad and angry with me, and especially when I remember that I have denied your first petition. I enclose a note for one hundred thalers, which I trust will relieve Hans’s embarrassment. By this post I send a letter to a friend of mine in New York, requesting him to hunt up Hans von Werthern in the hospital, and to talk with him over his future plans, and communicate the result to me. He may rest assured of my help, if I receive a favorable answer. I trust I have proved to you that I am not so parsimonious as you seem to think ; credulous and blindly trustful I am not. I like to feel the ground upon which I tread.

“ And now this affair is settled, and I trust that when we meet in the morning it will not be mentioned.

“ Good-night, my love, and be good to

“ YOUR FRITZ.”

I looked across at her, and wondered that she had not hastened to write him a line of thanks immediately. But she was standing perfectly quiet, and when she did at last turn around, her beautiful face wore its usual indifferent expression. She sat down under the lamplight and took up a book and began reading.

Nothing further had been said about the copying of the pictures since Lotta’s engagement. She had neglected her easel altogether. She sat the greater part of the time in the broad window-seat, leaning on her elbows, holding her head in her hands, lost in thought ; she seemed in a lethargy all the time,

My grandmother lay in bed in the adjoining room. She was not exactly sick, she said, "only tired." I went back and forth between the two rooms, with fear in my heart, as I looked at the tired old face that gazed up at me with a smile, and begged me to have patience with her, and then at the young girl, who looked worn and tired of life too, but gave me no friendly glance in return.

Some days she was remarkably gay, and began to paint her future life in spiteful humor.

"Only think what I will be able to do when I marry this wealthy, generous man. I can have a cake or two more at my little entertainment than Frau Superintendent is able to offer, and the brocade in my gown will cost a thaler more a yard than that worn by Frau Post-director. Yes, I will have great privileges when I become Frau Roden."

And at other times she would send Fritz to the seventh heaven by her graciousness and her condescending familiarity.

But generally she was silent or morose, and worried us all with her insufferable whims, and her pleasant moods were but few.

"For God's sake, Helena, what is the matter with Lotta?" the ardent lover would ask despairingly. "Who has vexed her? What has put

her out of humor? Perhaps she will confide in you."

I shook my head, denying all knowledge of her feelings. But I nevertheless believed that I did know, and that she felt herself oppressed by her engagement to him. What would be the end of it all? I often asked myself.

Christmas came and went, and Lotta's lap was filled with its treasures. It was pathetic to see Fritz seeking to fulfil her every wish, leaving no stone unturned to win from her a smile of approval, but she had literally none to give him.

Our exhortations that she should paint him a picture, or send him some little piece of work from her own hands, were all in vain. We always received the same answer.

"Do not disturb yourselves about me. Will I knit him a pair of mittens like those Rieke made David? Do not bother me—we are entirely too poor to give presents."

All his gifts to her were put carefully away in the bureau drawers; she touched nothing, she used nothing.

"Lotta," I begged, "do not vex him so greatly. You certainly can afford to accept presents from the man whom you intend to marry. It looks to me as though, sooner or later, you intend to break with him."

“Oh, no,” she answered; “I shall not do that at all; but let me alone, and do not torment me; I will do what I think best.”

“Little princess,” I began afresh, “be honest, for heaven’s sake, be honest. If you do not love him it is not too late yet——”

“Do not vex me,” she answered impatiently, “and attend to your own affairs. I know what I am doing.”

Near at hand was a heart that, with the unerring instinct of mother-love, knew her son would have much to suffer. Frau Roden did not hesitate to express her honest indignation at Lotta’s conduct. “Helena, Helena!” she said to me bitterly one day, “she does not love him; what kind of a marriage will it be? If he was only not so infatuated with that pretty face, and would come to his senses again. Ah, dear Helena, what has my dear boy done to deserve such treatment?”

And she dried her eyes furtively, for her “dear boy” must not see her weeping. She would say nothing further to him on the subject; for if she discouraged him and made him heart-sick, he would become incensed against her and not come to her any more with his confidences.

So, whatever his Lotta was, she was to him all he desired. It was he alone that would have to

put up with Lotta's whims. Marriage is a matter in which no third person should interfere.

"He was never hasty or passionate in all his life, Helena, but he would come to me immediately after and throw his arms around my neck, craving my pardon, and showing from his inmost heart his anxiety to make amends for any sharp words he had spoken. Oh, I know my dear boy, I know him well."

Our days passed slowly and uneventfully ; and we entered upon the new year, the memorable year of 1870, with no suspicion of the storm which was shortly to burst upon us with such fury. In our sequestered corner of the earth, time seemed to stand still ; January and February passed with their usual accompaniments of snow and ice ; with March the thaws began melting the snow from off our mountains, and permitting the little violets to peep forth in the gardens surrounding us. And Lotta went out in the warmer sunshine to gather the fragrant spring flowers that grew beside the walls. Grandmother would sit on the balcony, carefully propped up with pillows to breathe the soft spring air. The brown swelling buds were coming out rapidly on the branches of the trees, and the little shrubs were shining once more in their



renewed clothing of emerald green. As far as eye could reach, the newly-sown fields gave promise of the harvest to come, a hope always dear to the aged.

“I cannot tell,” said the old lady, looking intently at me as I sat opposite her, “whether it is my bad sight or not, but to me you seem greatly changed. Where has your round face gone?”

“I am quite well, grandmother; but Lotta looks bad.”

I looked down at Lotta as she walked with slow steps up and down by the wall. She would stoop over, as though lost in thought, then straighten herself up again, and a second later be stooping once more; and now she stood erect, for Schnips rushed off with a bark to meet Fritz, who was hastening forward to greet his betrothed. She gave him her hand and a nod of greeting as he put his arm around her waist, and remained as apathetic and listless as was her wont these last few months.

He spoke eagerly; I could hear his voice from where I sat, although I could not catch the words. She listened patiently; at last she took up her long black gown and turned and came toward the house.

“No, it cannot go on this way any longer,” I

heard him say as they entered the house together. A moment later they were in the living-room, and I went in at once to greet him. He looked red and excited, and was stroking his beard, a habit with him whenever he was deeply moved.

“No, it cannot go on any longer this way,” he repeated, as he shook hands with me.

“I must have my own way in this. Helena, you must stand by me ; you advise and help me to persuade Lotta that it is best for us to be married in May.”

She had taken no interest apparently in what he said, and stood passively near him. As he caught hold of her hand at the last words she drew it hastily back, and a deep color overspread her pale cheeks. But she answered never a word, only shrugged her shoulders.

At this his face grew darker.

“But why should we wait any longer ?” he asked. “I cannot bear to see you so sad, so idle. Nothing pleases you now that used to interest you. You do not read, you do not play on the piano, you do not paint at all. If we are married in May, we can travel ; I heard you say once that you would like to go up the Rhine—so we will go there. A change will be the best thing for you, and you will become your old self again, sweetheart. Is that not so, Helena ?”

She whom he loved so dearly answered nothing, but stood silent and turned a deaf ear to his pleadings.

“Now, say yes!” he coaxed. “Everything is in readiness for you at the house; the final arrangements will be the care of mother and Sister Helena; they will make it comfortable for us. And we will come back at harvest time, when everything is so cool and inviting in our mountains. Now, say yes!”

He had spoken half jestingly, but I could see his whole heart was in his request notwithstanding.

But Lotta did not say “yes.” She turned and went over to the window and looked out at the castle walls opposite, with their large bright windows; then, after a long pause, she said, without turning around:

“I cannot decide so quickly, and papa is not dead a year yet.”

He looked across at me: he was evidently both anxious and puzzled. But he urged nothing further on that day.

As though relieved of a burden, the young girl came suddenly back from the window.

“I am going to paint again,” she said energetically. “I will take advantage of the permission that has been given me to copy over

there at the castle ; there is a picture of still-life in the yellow chamber that has pleased me greatly. I will go across at once and ask if I may commence to-morrow." And she stepped in front of the silent, moody man, who watched her intently, and patted him on the arm. "No glacier this time, Frederick—a still-life picture, and when it is completed you can have it if you wish it."

It was the first time in many a day—perhaps, indeed, the very first time—she had spoken to him thus. He forgot that she had, after a childish fashion, put off any decision as to their future, and that it was as uncertain as ever, forgot everything but the fact of her unexpected friendliness. A happy smile came over his face.

"Yes," he said, "paint the picture of still-life—soon, my dearest !"

Lotta began her painting at the castle with great zeal.

The hangings were drawn back from the windows in the yellow chamber, and at times she would come to one of them, holding her canvas up for me to catch a glimpse of it, and giving me a contented nod at the same time.

It seemed to me that her countenance had become animated again ; she chatted at table, and

did not sit by the hour staring into space as she had done nearly all winter.

The old charming smile, half roguish, half childish, played again at times around her mouth ; but whenever she dined or spent an evening with Fritz's mother, at his earnest solicitation, she came back looking pale and wearied, and complained that she was nervous.

She said the old lady oppressed her with her prosy manner and still prosier talk, just like a bürger's frau, and she had hard work to avoid yawning when she was in the middle of one of her twice-told tales.

The old lady knew nothing of the last new novels, and had never heard any of Offenbach's gay operas. On the little desk, with her Goethe and Schiller and Lessing, lay a book entitled "The Palladium of Noble Womanhood," with golden rules for wives and maidens.

Lotta had looked the book through once, and had laughed heartily at its old-fashioned illustrations and quaint text.

Frau Roden naturally enough resented Lotta's sneers, and Fritz was in a very uncomfortable position, because she complained to him about all his sweetheart's shortcomings. The simple songs which Frau Roden had played and sung in her youth were commented upon with commiserat-

ing kindness, and for three days Lotta nicknamed her future mother-in-law the "dear moon," because she had innocently related how fond she was of the song, "Dear moon, you move so silently," and how often she had sung it when she was a bride. Fritz's mother in her turn declared that the melodies from Offenbach which Lotta was fond of playing were mere empty jingles, and she brought out some of Beethoven's sonatas, which Lotta spurned as too antique and solemn.

Yes, the little princess was intensely bored; she could not appreciate the contentment which comes to a human heart after years of painful striving, when it has grown old in labor and trouble, and can look back with pride upon a long and honest life. Such a serenity was to her simply insufferably commonplace.

Up in the great gable room sat four seamstresses working on the household linen.

"Children, I beg you," the practical old lady said one day, "do not make up any linen, for I have quantities of it piled away in chests and on spindles, and it would be great waste to get more. Fritz is my only child, and this linen has been accumulating since my grandmother's time. There have been no daughters in the Roden family for three generations—only sons. And

it is a blessing that now there will be a reason for letting it see the light."

And then she would show us the piles of costly linen and damask of the finest, upon all of which she was having the initials C. V. W. daintily embroidered.

"For," said the kind woman, turning to me, "no one need know that Lotta did not bring them with her; the people about here are so curious and talk so much. I told the women upstairs you had no place for them to sew over at your rooms."

But Lotta took little heed of all this. She did not act as a thankful daughter should have done toward the old lady. This girl, who came with empty hands, and did not contribute a penny's worth toward her own outfit, gave expression to no word of thanks; there was no feeling of gratitude for all the thoughtfulness and consideration that was shown her.

According to her notion it was from the other side that thanks were due; she turned away carelessly, and threw her beautiful head back with an indifferent toss, vouchsafing but a passing glance at the good things of life that were being especially prepared for her.

No word had been spoken about Hans since the eventful evening on which Lotta had quar-



relled with her lover ; but I learned that Fritz had, upon the receipt of a letter from his New York friend, sent off some more money, for which Hans had asked. And no answer had been received in return.

I said nothing about the matter, for I was ashamed of this miserable begging ; and Lotta never mentioned her brother's name again.

The spring time came on gently, with its soft breezes and clear, fragrant air, bringing with it its old but ever new joys—the songs of birds, the blossoming of flowers, the fresh, vivid green wherever the eye turned—and before the April days were gone the nightingales were once more under our windows. I do not know why I cried so much ; whether there was in my mind a presentiment of what was to follow, or whether I felt within me the consciousness that there was spring time and happiness for all the world besides, but for me there was nothing.

I led a strange life at that time,—I can say nothing more. I knew that my days were like a slow stream running on between two unattractive shores, with care and labor and dismal thoughts that made one silent and sad and dull. I saw before me the great endless stretch of time ere I should be as old as my grandmother, and I prayed in my heart : “ Good God, do not let

me live so long." It was a fearful experience through which I passed. The one thing which caused me the greatest uneasiness was the earnest, sombre face of Fritz Roden.

He also is not happy, I thought; for he is battling against his better judgment. He can struggle yet with the fears that oppress him; but for me there is no hope; all is over in my life.

"Will you not come over and see how I am getting on with my picture?" asked Lotta, one morning, as she was starting for the castle. "Come over for me to-day; there is much that is worth seeing, aside from the pictures. All the furnishings and adornments are wonderfully rich and beautiful, and are of the time of the first Napoleon. Anita declares they are all quite original; it is something to see in this age of monotonous sameness. Or will you be too much engaged in arranging your toilet for the supper at the great house to-night? I suppose one could not get out of going to it? For—what a triumph—the gentry of Rodenberg will at last be presented to the future Frau Roden."

"I have nothing to prepare for myself, Lotta," I answered. "I shall wear my black silk gown, but I would like to get in readiness something

suitable for you. I think your soft white silk would do nicely ; for you know, as the betrothed of the master of the house, and the guest in honor of whom the supper is given, you should be as attractive as possible. I will take off the blue ribbons and put black velvet ones in their place, if you say so."

She did not answer me, but I saw that her face wore a fretful expression.

"Will you come?" she asked evasively.

"Yes, Lotta. But I do not know how to get to the rooms. I will come over about half-past eleven, when grandmother takes her nap."

"Ring at the large middle door, and when you are admitted go up the steps and through the glass door to your right ; that will bring you into a long corridor, then you come to the seventh door on your right. Good-by till then."

By half-past eleven I had finished the changes that were needed on Lotta's gown. It was an elegant costume of rich white silk and golden white cashmere. She had had it made to wear at a bazaar at the palace of a Russian ambassador, where she was a flower-girl in one of the booths—the last time that she had seen the shimmer and glitter of fashionable life. I shuddered as the past came before me so clearly; one can hardly understand how trifles which make no

impression at the time can come back so vividly in after-days.

I had almost forgotten my promise to Lotta, but I made haste and started for the castle.

As I passed by the great house I saw all the windows thrown wide open, and caught a glimpse of the mistress herself with her dust-brush in her hand, but so busily engaged that she did not notice me.

Ah, the preparations for this evening! And I could not help thinking how rejoiced they were that Lotta had finally yielded to Fritz's entreaties to allow an announcement supper to be given in honor of their betrothal.

"Dear child, one must live in the midst of these people," she had urged, "and they take an interest in all that concerns us, just as we do in them; and, believe me, there is no harm in possessing good friends and kind neighbors. And I want Lotta to be friendly with every one. It will do her no harm, and prevent people gossiping among themselves. You know, Helena, that every one here believes her to be proud and unamiable, and she certainly gives them reason to think so. She will not visit them, and hardly seems to notice them."

Whether Lotta would ever be friendly or cordial with the Rotenberg people I could not tell:

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but I did not like to think about it at all, for I greatly feared the contrary.

And now I found myself under the great linden-trees that surrounded the principal entrance of the castle, and was soon ringing at the door Lotta had indicated, upon which was a plate with the name, "GOVERNOR."

The door was opened immediately, and I stepped into a large hall with broad flights of stairs going up on either side, with two bronze knights as sentinels at their base. As I ascended the marble stairs I looked with interest at the rich and historic frescoes which adorned the walls, and the magnificent bronze chandeliers. The cool, damp atmosphere struck me painfully, and I shuddered at the almost ghostly stillness which is a natural accompaniment of uninhabited rooms.

When I reached the top of the stairs I found a large vestibule, inlaid in white lacquer-work, hung with purple curtains, and finished in a rich but antique fashion ; from the windows I caught a glimpse of the courtyard with its prim-looking plots of grass.

Large glass doors afforded an exit from both sides of this vestibule ; and going through the left one, as Lotta had directed, I found myself in a long, dimly-lighted corridor, whose walls were broken here and there by folding-doors,

niches with statuary, and bronze candelabra. I counted the doors until I came to the seventh, which I opened, and as they swung noiselessly back I entered a small anteroom. The floor was covered with a soft, thick carpet, and the walls were hung with Gobelin tapestry ; over the marble mantel hung a mirror framed in prism-cut glass, which gave a golden, glistening effect to the entire room. Two doors, each covered with Turkish portières, led out of this room into inner ones, and a superb copy of Battoni's Penitent Magdalen hung above a richly-carved piece of furniture, half buffet, half cabinet.

I stopped suddenly, for, almost as I entered, I heard my sister's rich, clear laugh, as I had not heard it since we left Berlin, so silvery, so strange, for I had almost forgotten its sound. And this laugh was followed by the full, deep tones of a man's voice, as he said gayly :

“ You do not believe me ? ”

I stood motionless when I heard it. Glancing at the mirror above, I could see Lotta's profile, as the glistening frame threw its many-colored rays over her ; her finely-shaped head, with its coil of dark hair, seemed to rise out of the yellow satin frame of her chair. She sat at her easel, her back half turned to me, as she looked at the speaker, who was standing by the canvas on

which she was painting; a man's face, upon which was stamped the imprints of youth and good fortune, out of whose blue eyes shone a happy, light-hearted gayety.

He was looking at my sister with a glance of ecstasy, much as a painter would look at an old master's work. The sight filled me with anxiety.

"No, your highness," I heard her repeat again, "I do not believe it. I have finished my work, and as my sister does not appear to be coming, I— Fräulein Anita will be kind enough to look after my painting materials and see that they are sent across to me." I saw through the mirror that she rose as she spoke.

I came forward instantly when I saw her move; and, as I made my appearance in front of the portière which had shaded me, I was conscious of an inquisitorial glance—anything but friendly—that greeted me from Lotta's companion. "Lotta!" I called, and I do not know to this day whether I bowed as etiquette demanded or not; but Lotta turned quietly toward me, and said:

"My sister, your highness!"

"I have disturbed your sister after a most inexcusable fashion," said he, with polite greeting. "I was on the point of starting for Castle Grunen, and took it into my head to run down here for a day before I went, and what was my



surprise when I entered this room to find a young lady painting diligently, for the governor had forgotten to inform me of the permission he had accorded her."

"And I was frightened not a little," said Lotta, as she unfastened her painting-apron. "But, your highness, you see the picture is finished, and I will disturb you no longer."

"On the contrary, it is not finished," he said, as he looked attentively at her work. "Do you not see, Fräulein von Werthern, that there is a ray of light yet needed on that chalice of red wine? The color of the peach is too deep, and the diamond ring there in the corner, which lies so carelessly and yet so full of meaning near that dish of luscious fruit on the green satin cover, is but meagrely sketched; you must give it more attention. Look again at the original. It is the work of a great master, old Petro de Ring; you must treat it with the reverence which it deserves. In my opinion you have several days' work before you ere your copy will be perfect."

"These are only trifles," replied Lotta decidedly, "which I can attend to just as well at home." And as the prince made a hasty movement to interrupt her, she added quickly, "I wish to give the picture away to-day, your highness."

“To her betrothed,” said I; and I felt that my voice sounded deep and earnest, but I could not help it.

He looked at Lotta in astonishment, and there was a question in his glance.

“Yes,” said the girl in a low tone and with fixed eyes on the floor, “to my betrothed.”

“He is a man to be envied,” said the prince, but without taking his eyes off her.

Lotta caught up her straw hat hastily and lifted her damp picture from the easel: she was very pale, and about her mouth I saw again the hard expression which for the last few weeks had never left it.

With a profound bow she retired from the room, catching me by the hand as she went, and throwing a curt greeting to Anita, who stood listlessly looking out of the window.

In another moment we were passing swiftly through the corridor. We hurried down the steps, and were soon walking under the chestnuts toward our home; neither of us had spoken a word.

“How did it happen that the prince arrived so unexpectedly?” I asked at last.

“I do not know, Helena,” she answered. “I was painting, and Anita was gossiping, and I had just asked her to put some wood in the stove, for

I felt chilly, when I heard a carriage drive hastily into the court beneath. I knew from the sound that it was no conveyance from this neighborhood, and was reminded of the high-stepping horses and heavy equipages of our dear Berlin. Anita was listening too, all ears, but she said nothing, and began again to chat of trifling matters. Soon, however, I heard a step behind me, and turning, saw the prince by my side. It was very painful for me, as you can understand. Then he told me just what he repeated to you, that, as he was going to Grunen, the fancy struck him to come to Rotenberg, just to see again the place where he had spent at one time so many tedious weeks. It was not a pleasant *contretemps* for me, Helena, so don't say any more about it."

"You will be forced to desist from your favorite occupation,—for a time, at least,—Lotta."

She sighed and looked at her picture. "He will doubtless be away again soon, but it was not pleasant to be taken by surprise after such a fashion."

When we crossed the Rodens' court, I turned to the left toward home. Lotta stood irresolutely for a moment, and then said: "I think I will stop for an instant, Helena, or will you give him the picture?"

“No,” I answered, “but I will accompany you.”

“Wait,” she said, “I will join you in a moment.”

I did not understand Lotta then, but afterward it seemed to me that an instinctive feeling—a presentiment—what you will—of the shadows that were so soon to cross her pathway was upon her that morning.

“Is your master at home?” I heard her ask. Then she disappeared within the doorway, and I heard her step across the marble hall. A moment later, and she was by my side again with empty hands.

“He was not in, and I placed it on his writing-table,” she said, putting her arm in mine as we crossed the stone pavement together.

“Had we not better go back and see his mother, if but for a moment?” I asked.

“Not on my account,” she answered. “I believe we should only disturb her any way; she is engaged up to her eyes in preparations for the evening.”

I had my way, however, and we entered the house for a friendly word with the old lady.

In the great room everything seemed in readiness for the festivities of the evening. The table glistened with fine crystal and rich, old-

fashioned silver plate. In the middle stood a gracefully-shaped silver epergne, filled with field-flowers, gold-dragon and jasmine, and over two of the chairs an arbor of small green birch branches had been formed. In front of these two places of honor stood an immense cake, surmounted by a sugar Cupid pointing his arrow toward the chairs, as though he would pierce the hearts of the two who should sit within the arbor.

"Those seats are for Fritz and you," I whispered, and looked anxiously at Lotta. She appeared like one turned to stone as she gazed at the arch. Around her mouth played ever the old sneering smile, but there were tears in her eyes.

"How frightful!" I heard her say.

We found our hostess in an adjoining room, where she was adorning the chandeliers with wreaths.

"There," she said, "you have come through the great room and seen the preparations, and I wanted it all to be a surprise to Lotta. Our people adorned the places for the happy pair. But, now that you are here, you can help me a little if you will, for Fritz left me in the lurch to-day, and has not yet returned from his ride." And she handed Lotta ribbon to make

bows and streamers for the wreaths, and called upon me to assist her in what she was doing.

“Only think,” she said, going on hastily with her work all the while, “while I was busy in the upper rooms this morning, I saw a carriage and horses driven into the courtyard of the castle, and Prince Otto in it, too. I only caught a glimpse, but am sure it was he. I was surprised, I can tell you. What could have brought him here now? I heard he had forsworn Rotenberg altogether, and considered it a dull, poky place, even though he does own such a fine residence here.”

Lotta remained perfectly silent, and continued cutting the long paper strips for tapers which had just been handed her.

“You are quite right,” I answered, “Prince Otto is here.”

The old lady threw down her wreath and clasped her hands together.

“God in heaven !” she cried, “I wonder what he has done this time that he is sent here again to do penance ! Children, you have the rascal just opposite you ; be careful never to go near your windows.”

Lotta laughed suddenly at this, and so heartily that her white teeth glistened through her parted lips.

“Do you know him personally?” asked Lotta.

“Oh, yes, indeed,” chatted the dear old lady; “he’s a beautiful boy, looks just like Goethe must have looked when he came back to Friederika at Sesenheim. No wonder that he finds favor with the women, but really he is too bad; but he heard the truth once from me any way, as he doubtless never had heard it before. I could do it, you know, for when he was a child he was here with us all the time, playing with my youngest boy, Max. Bless me! how those two lads tore in and out, now on the roof, now on the haymow, and now on the topmost rafters of the barn; it seemed to me they were everywhere that they had no business to be. Since he has grown up he always comes in to see me and shake hands, and he never fails to say: ‘Frau Roden, I have never eaten anything which tasted half so good as those potato dumplings which you used to bake for me; you know how we used to sit in the kitchen and eat them right hot out of the pan.’ But never mind that; I was about to tell of the lecture I gave him. That was over two years ago. The duke had sent him here into confinement on account of some wild prank—I never knew what—that he might have time for reflection—‘far from Madrid.’ Well, I suppose he did do some reflecting, but for the most part he



turned our quiet Rotenberg topsy-turvy. He brought tight-rope dancers here ; he bought himself an elephant, on which he rode around the castle garden dressed as a Turk ; he inveigled a company of strolling players into our tumble-down old theatre to play Offenbach's nonsense, and all the boys in the village whistled the airs, and their sisters sang the stupid stuff till we were fain to stop our ears.

“He sent complimentary tickets to all the families where there were any pretty daughters, and had the boxes full of blondes and brunettes every evening, each one prettier than the other, and all the silly things were as conceited as if each one had received some great honor and special attention.

“Paul, the shoemaker, who lives over yonder on the corner, had a dear little girl eighteen years old, white and rosy, with dark blue eyes ; I never saw a lovelier picture. She was a godchild of mine, and I loved her tenderly. Well—but it is not right that I should tell you all this ; I'll make it short. There came a day when Anna would have given her life if it had not been as it was. The foolish child left her father's house stealthily in the night and fog, and went to her aunt's up yonder in the mountains. She has never come back. Her poor mother grieved her-

self to death for the unfortunate girl, and to this hour no one dares to speak her name in her father's presence. What is done is done ! Just at the time when the whole village was talking about the affair, the young scapegrace had the temerity to come and see me. 'Twas in the twilight of a rainy autumn day ; I was not disposed to let the opportunity pass, so I had it out with him.

“ ‘Your highness,’ I said, ‘those whom God has set to rule over their fellows on earth, he has elevated that they may be an example to their subjects.’ He looked at me and smiled. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘Frau Roden, that’s a function which my father, the duke, and my brother, the heir apparent, are discharging to the best of their ability.’ I looked at him very earnestly ; we were standing by the window, and I pointed over to the shoemaker’s little dwelling ; he kept on smiling, but I was not to be turned aside. ‘Your highness,’ I continued, ‘’twas only a poor cobbler’s child, but her parents loved her just as dearly as your mother loves you, in tears and sorrow.’ This time the smile faded from his face, and he gave me his hand. ‘You may scold me, Frau Roden,’ he said, ‘I know you mean well.’”

She ceased speaking. Lotta had turned aside and was vigorously cutting paper ; the noise of

her clipping was the only sound that broke the silence. "Dear, dear," sighed the old lady after a few moments, as she took up a duster from the nearest chair, "what confusion and trouble he'll bring again into our quiet village."

When, a half-hour later, we had returned to our house, Lotta, who had seemed for a time to be lost in thought, suddenly exclaimed :

"Do you know, Helena, he reminds me very much of our Hans. Hans was just as merry and amiable as Prince Otto."

"And just as deceitful and deficient in earnestness and real generosity," I added.

About seven o'clock in the evening we went over to the supper. Grandmother was attired in ceremonious black, with a lace mantle thrown over her shoulders, and a dainty lace cap on her head ; I was dressed soberly in black silk with long, sweeping train ; my only ornament was a diamond brooch which had belonged to my mother. Lotta led the way. She was indeed a charming sight, with her slender girlish form in a dress of snowy white, walking in the rosy glow of the setting sun. There had been a slight shower in the afternoon, and the air was delightfully fresh ; crystal drops were glistening still on every leaf.

"I believe I am nervous," said Lotta. "I

wish it was well over and we were home again."

She had hardly spoken when a manly form stepped out from under the linden-trees and came toward us.

"Lotta, dear girl, how beautiful you are!" he cried, seizing both her hands and holding her at arm's length as he regarded her with delight. "It was so good of you to wear a white dress. It does not matter if we keep our guests waiting a few moments, and, Helena, you will tell my mother that we are coming immediately; I must keep Lotta here a moment to thank her for her goodness to-day." And he led her to a rustic seat near by, sheltered by the low linden branches, and upon which lay a magnificent bouquet of rare flowers.

We hurried on, and my grandmother said:

"Do not you think Lotta is changed; that she conceals something from us? It seems to me as if she was always trying to conquer a feeling of aversion or repugnance toward him. Just now I thought she would have given anything to escape from him altogether."

Indeed, the betrothed pair were already coming on behind us; the thanks must have been cut short after all. They came up to us rather formally; Lotta was carrying her train in one

hand and her flowers in the other. She was deadly pale, and he red. Strange to say, he did not look well in evening dress with his white tie ; his hunting-jacket and top-boots suited him much better.

We could hear the sound of many voices as we reached the house. Rieke, in snowy cap, opened the door for us, and my grandmother crossed the threshold leaning on my arm. As we entered the large room the chatter ceased, and the curious guests looked at us with interest as our hostess introduced us : “ The Frau von Werthern and her eldest niece—and—here is the dear bride of my son.”

Fritz and Lotta had entered behind us. For one instant there was silence, and then a perfect stream of words were whispered over us : “ Honor—joy—acquaintance ! ” Grandmother bowed to all and then sat down on a sofa, and I seated myself near the young Frau Diakonns. Lotta still stood by the side of her *fiancé*, until he, with some haste, brought her a chair, which he placed near me, and in which she sank immediately.

Our entrance seemed to have put a stop to all general conversation ; several of the young people disappeared one after another through the low window on to the lawn. Every one’s glance was directed toward the lovely, proud face of the

future bride. Two young girls clad in some rosy, gauzy material whispered with one another and evidently compared notes. Fritz talked to one of the gentlemen about the prospects for a good harvest, and grandmother talked in a low tone to Frau Oberförster.

I tried to draw Lotta into a harmless conversation I was having with my little blonde neighbor in regard to the acoustical properties of the village church, but to no purpose—she had evidently decided that silence was golden. It made me very sad; I alone knew how charmingly Lotta could converse when she wished. At last some one mentioned the name "Prince Otto," and then the tongues seemed loosened, and all began, either in praise or blame, to discuss that young nobleman.

"He will remain here, of course," said one.

"Oh, to be sure! He has no greater desire than to live always in our midst," quoth another.

"I wonder whether he will have a gondola trip this time, such as he had two years ago?" cried a young lady with sparkling eyes.

"We shall know soon enough," said the bürgermeister with a sigh.

"He will certainly have the theatre open," interrupted the Frau Oberförster, evidently pleased.

“Oh, yes, for a spectacular play at least,” added her husband dryly.

There was much said both for and against the prince. The gentlemen shrugged their shoulders and did not seem anxious to talk about the gay young man; and the wives and daughters found a thousand excuses for all his jolly pranks.

“It brings in some money to the poor people when there are guests at the castle,” said the bürgermeister’s practical wife.

“And we’ll hear some good music occasionally,” said another.

“Rotenberg would be buried altogether if he did not come occasionally.”

“Indeed it would,” scounded a chorus of young girls’ voices.

“There it is again, the old, old story,” said the chief forester, in a tone which brought every one else to silence. “If any one wants to have luck with the women he must get himself into a dozen or two bad scrapes and see to it that he goes through a certain number of love intrigues.”

The chorus of ladies here brought the speaker to a halt.

“That is not nice of you,” said the superintendent’s wife, “but you are always full of malice.”

All the ladies joined in the attack upon the



laughing man, who, to escape the reproaches of the enemy, ran to the window and thrust his fingers into his ears.

“But, my dear ladies,” he cried in supplicatory accents, “it is an established fact, that whenever a notorious robber has been executed, the officers have always found among his effects thousands of tender epistles.”

The announcement that supper was ready brought the debate to a close.

The affianced pair led the way into the dining-room, and Lotta stood with impenetrable countenance before her seat of honor; then she took her place beneath the hanging birch branches. The sight of the girl’s beautiful and motionless face gave me a strange feeling of anxiety. I noticed that she refused one dish after another, that Fritz bent toward her with deep concern, and then suddenly stood up and with one quick stroke brought the whole arch to the ground.

I had received my place by the side of the jovial chief forester. He was about to further illustrate his former proposition, when he was interrupted by a sharp ringing of glasses.

The superintendent had risen and struck his glass, and was getting ready to make a speech.

He turned to the betrothed pair. He spoke of the happiness which must come to that house

into which so lovely a bride should enter. She would find roses strewn upon the threshold in gratitude for the roses of joy which she brought with her.

He spoke of the Roden family, which had dwelt so long in this house, and could look back with pride upon a long line of honorable men and virtuous women; and he remarked with especial emphasis that she who gave her hand to the last of the Rodens might well deem herself blessed, for from his youth he had always been a man whose heart was in the right spot. And so he drank to the health of the young pair, whom he hoped soon to see before the altar of St. Mary's Church: "A happy courtship and a peaceful married life."

"God save!" cried all the guests in rousing chorus, as they crowded round the *fiancés* with their champagne glasses in their hands.

In the midst of the tumult I saw opposite to me the open door, and in the doorway stood—Prince Otto.

Frau Roden observed him before any one else. I heard her astonished "God preserve us—the prince!"

Then she stepped rapidly forward to bid him welcome.

He was no stranger in that company, and his

coming occasioned only joyous surprise. After a gallant compliment to my grandmother and a hearty grasp of the hand with Fritz Roden, he took a chair and seated himself by Lotta's side, begging that the guests would not disturb themselves on his account. He had, he said, only come to bring his personal congratulations to his old playfellow, and would straightway disappear.

Indeed, no one was disturbed by his coming, he began to chat so innocently with Lotta, drank toasts with Fritz, and laughed as heartily as any young man would who knows that he is a welcome guest in a merry company. He declined to eat anything, but he sipped the sparkling champagne with evident satisfaction.

I observed, too, that Lotta sipped her glass more frequently; soon her eyes began to sparkle with their old fire, her tongue was loosened, and she was again her old fascinating self.

Her betrothed sat silent, and played with his empty glass. He and I were the only ones in the company who were not gayly chatting. I was almost suffocated by a nameless fear. The warm room, with its heavy odors of wine and food and flowers, was becoming intolerable to me. But no one thought of rising, for the prince still sat at Lotta's side, drinking and chatting, forgetful that he had spoken of leaving.

At length he sprang to his feet and offered Lotta his arm.

“To the garden, ladies and gentlemen,” he exclaimed ; “it is a wonderful spring night out of doors.”

“Come, Helena,” whispered Fritz, as he gave me his arm.

He fairly dragged me along after the handsome pair, who were already moving through the hall, past the line of gaping servants, toward the garden.

Soft moonlight filled the night, the perfume of flowers was in the air, and in the bushes sang the nightingale.

As if in a dream I walked behind Lotta’s white and lightly moving form. Neither of us spoke, but I knew by the restless light of his eye that Fritz’s heart was suffering. I felt for him an unspeakable compassion ; the hot tears rolled down my cheeks and would not be restrained.

“Are you crying, Helena ?” he asked.

“No,” I said, ashamed to confess the truth.

“How do you like his highness ?” he inquired with a bitter accent. But before I could answer he added :

“Let us turn about. I am tired of loitering in their wake.”

I made no move to comply, however.

“What would you have me to do then, Helena?” he said softly. “True gold would not melt in a fire where there is so much more flame than heat.”

We turned around then and went back in silence. As we came near to the lindens, we passed close by the windows of the banqueting hall. The chief forester was inside, and was filling all the glasses from a great punchbowl.

“Now sing, friends,” we heard him say. “But where are the young people? Oh, sure enough, scattered through the garden in sentimental promenade. Well, well, we did no better in our time.”

I could not bear that Fritz should show himself to the merry party without Lotta, so I led him aside unobserved along the path leading to the lindens. I felt I must say something, and I could think of nothing but Hans.

“You said some time ago that you would write to a friend in New York; did you do it?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Did you receive no answer?”

“Oh, yes, I received an answer, Helena; but do not let us talk of that to-night. Let us go in.”

“Not without Lotta,” I said stubbornly.

“We must not coerce any one,” said he. “She

is doubtless amusing herself. Do you hear that, Helena ?”

And as he spoke we heard her merry laugh in the distance.

“That is she, is it not ?” said he ; “no one but Lotta can laugh like that.”

Just then I caught a glimpse of her white dress, and I called to her loudly, “Lotta, Lotta, your *fiancé* is looking for you.”

She came toward us, and in the moonlight I could see the warm glow on her cheeks, the merry light in her eyes, and the happy smile on her lips.

Silently she walked by Fritz’s side, and silently the prince walked by mine. Presently his highness said, in an indifferent tone :

“I think, perhaps, it would be better for me to take French leave, otherwise my going might disturb the company. In my boyhood I learned all the paths about here, and if I push through that bush yonder I can in a moment reach the garden gate unobserved. Good-night, Fräulein von Werthern.”

The next instant the bushes closed behind the graceful form, and he had disappeared.

All the company had come out under the trees, and the singing began. Even the old folks joined in the refrain. Lotta sat beside her

lover, leaning her head against the trunk of a tree, and looking up into the gently waving branches. Grandmother came up to me quickly, and whispered :

“Take me home, Helena, I want to go to rest. “You can come back, you know.”

But I remained at home, and sat down on the balcony that looked out over the garden. The lights in the mansion house shone brightly through the leaves of the trees, and the songs they sang below me reached me plainly where I sat. At length the strain died away and the singers dispersed, but the nightingale warbled on alone.

I heard steps on the path beneath, and the rustle of a woman's dress. It was Lotta and Fritz. They paused under the balcony. “Good-night,” he said tenderly, and kissed her as he spoke. “And once again I must thank you for the picture. It has given me a most heartfelt pleasure.”

But she only shook her head hastily.

“Good-night,” she said.

Her words sounded very loud and very cold ; then she disappeared like a sprite.

We retired without exchanging a word. But during the night, as I awoke from a deep slumber, I saw her sitting up in bed, staring into the moonlight, erect and motionless.





## CHAPTER VI.

ROTENBERG stood upon its head—it is no exaggeration to say so. The little sleepy town appeared to have been suddenly transformed. From the castle tower the great red-white flag floated gayly in the soft May air, and all the shops were decorated with smaller ones of like color.

It looked now as if the prince's stay would be much longer than we had imagined from his careless words to us on the day of his arrival. On the ground floor a cook appeared with his long white apron and cap to match, and on the evening of the second day several carriages and horses and two lackeys had arrived. The prince had come to stay, at least until some new whim called him away.

It was a pleasant change for the good Rotenberg folk. There was to be a concert in the park, and an illumination at the Hermitage. Booths and tents had been put up for Rotenberg's annual rifle match on the meadows just

before the prince's arrival. He was an honorary member of the association, and when it was known that he would be present at the match, the club erected in his honor a gorgeous tent in the ducal colors, red and white. On every street corner were pasted enormous play-bills :

“DUCAL COURT THEATRE OF ROTENBERG.

“*The Beautiful Galatea.*”

The morning after the festivities at Frau Roden's, we were awakened from our slumber by strains of solemn music : it was the town band serenading the prince. It was the beginning of a jolly season for the young people of the town. We alone sat quietly at home—more quietly than ever. Lotta had chosen the little balcony for her retreat, and there, under the dark red awning which I had constructed out of some old curtains, she sat, day after day, reading, sewing, or gazing dreamily into the garden. She was not even to be persuaded to take a walk ; for one day, as we wandered along a lonely forest path, his highness suddenly stood before us, and with the most gracious persistency had compelled us to accept his company for the rest of our walk. He brought us home through the main street and past the Roden mansion. The

villagers opened their windows to look after us. Fritz, who saw us coming, met us at the gate and escorted us home through the garden. He made no remark, neither did we, but after that Lotta would not go out any more.

One day a lackey brought us an invitation to a "bal champêtre" in the castle grounds. Lotta hardly looked at the note, and put it aside at once.

"Can we refuse?" asked grandmother, with a sigh.

"I certainly shall," said Lotta.

"To be sure," said I to the old lady; "we are in mourning."

"For me he is only an unmarried gentleman," explained Lotta, "who has not the right to receive ladies. The people here may esteem it an honor to obey his highness's command, but I am not ambitious for such a distinction."

"I am sure I am satisfied," said the old lady, as she took up her newspaper and buried herself in the description of the ceremonies accompanying the unveiling of the statue of Friedrich Wilhelm III., in the pleasure gardens at Berlin. Her newspaper was the only thing for which grandmother showed any interest; every now and then as she read she gave utterance to a murmur of approval or dissent, then she would shake

her head in anger as she noted the disturbances the French were making. Often she would turn to us and tell with great vivacity how, in her early youth, she had heard the sound of the guns at the battle of Leipsic. Her father's estate lay on the Saxon frontier, some three miles from the battle-field. She became very much excited, and seemed to renew her youth during these narrations. "We shall certainly live to see another Leipsic!" was the prophecy with which she habitually closed her recitals.

"God be praised, we are living in times of the most profound peace," I whispered, and thought of the anxiety I had suffered on account of Hans in the war of 1866. What cared I for Napoleon and Luxembourg and the Spanish Succession? Here at home a battle was being fought, hard and hot, destroying both peace and happiness.

Lotta was plainly ill at ease during these long spring days, and evidently had something on her mind often. She walked the rooms impatiently and with flushed cheeks, and twice when in this restless mood sent the maid hastily across the garden for Fritz, as though she had something to tell him which she could no longer repress. But on each occasion, when he came in answer to her message, she shut herself in her room as soon as his footsteps were heard, and it was with diffi-

culty I could induce her to go out and meet the puzzled lover who had responded to her bidding. The meetings were painful in the extreme, for Lotta sat almost silent, manifestly distressed by his presence, so that he soon went away again, sad and anxious as he had come.

On the day on which we had despatched our regrets to the ball Anita appeared :

“The prince had sent to ask whether he might pay his respects to Frau von Werthern?”

The old lady was fairly in ecstasy at this condescension, and informed the smiling Anita that she would consider it an honor to receive his highness.

That afternoon, between four and five, he came and paid his respects to grandmother in the most deferential manner. Lotta was not visible. With glistening eyes he searched for a moment in every corner of the room, and then chatted cheerily about all sorts of harmless things; about his mother, about his visit to Baden-Baden, his travels in the East, and, finally, he spoke of Rotenberg and of his ball, and just at that moment Lotta came in.

I looked at her in surprise. She had donned in all haste a white summer dress, and her face was as colorless as the gown she wore.

Prince Otto sprang to his feet as if electrified.

“We were just speaking of my little fête ; you must come, Fräulein von Werthern.”

“I regret exceedingly to decline, your highness. You know that we are still in mourning for our father,” she replied pleasantly.

“Then I will recall the invitations,” he cried.

“Oh, by no means, your highness,” she stammered, blushing. “I beg that you will excuse me !”

He made no answer, and in a few moments took his departure.

On the same evening letters flew through the little town stating that the fête would be postponed on account of a journey which the prince was about to undertake ; even we received one of the missives.

“God be praised, he’s going to leave the town,” I said to myself. But he had no such thought.

On the day which had been appointed for the ball, he sat calmly reading by his open window.

Anita came across the street to speak to Lotta.

“I am bringing back some paints which your sister forgot,” she said, and slipping by me went up to the balcony where Lotta sat knitting

I wanted to follow her, but I feared to face Lotta, for I knew her eyes would say, “What do you want here ?”

When I went up to her at last, I found them

talking of Italy, and other indifferent things, and the colors lay upon the table.

“Do you know, Helena,” said Lotta, “I am going to take lessons in Italian. Anita is going to teach me, and we have begun already. Oh, it is a heavenly language !”

I looked at them in astonishment, but I could find no valid reason for my repugnance to the arrangement.

“To be sure, Lotta, if you think it necessary——”

“No, it is not necessary,” she retorted with some irritation, “neither is it necessary to paint and read ; I suppose you think that all that sort of thing is superfluous—art and beauty and poetry,—none of those things are necessary ! Bah ! It’s a dreadful word. I hate it !”

“Well, Lotta, do as you like if it gives you any pleasure.”

She was right enough, but the teacher was the stumbling-block to me.

“Oh, I mean to do it, and we begin to-morrow.”

In the afternoon she put on her straw hat, took her little portemonnaie, and went out ; when she came back she brought with her a number of copy-books and an old dilapidated Italian grammar ; her enthusiasm was always at red heat



over anything new. That evening I went over for a moment to see Frau Roden. Fritz had just come in from the field, and I met him in the hall.

“Alone?” he asked sadly.

“Yes, Fritz, for Lotta is learning Italian; she intends to take lessons from Anita.” And in my anxiety, I added: “Don’t allow her to do it, Fritz; put your foot down and forbid it.”

He looked at me with open eyes.

“I forbid it?” he said bitterly, and turned and went into his room without another word.

Frau Roden turned pale when I told her of this new caprice, but she suppressed her vexation and said nothing. As I was leaving, she said: “His energy is all gone, Helena; he has always been a determined man, but he seems utterly powerless now to bring this wretched business to an end with one firm word. Oh, Helena, such natures feel the most; he loves her too well, too well!”

I tried to comfort her, and said that Lotta’s was not a petty nature, that she had pride and nobility enough of soul to keep her word in its entirety.

But the old lady only shook her head: “Perhaps she will, I don’t doubt that, but—well, God will help!” She dried her tears.

We were soon well into the summer, and Rotenberg was enjoying the pleasures of the season, but it brought little change into our quiet life. There was music in the Schützen Park and in the concert gardens ; in the evening the people went in crowds to the theatre, and the sounds of their footsteps and of their laughing voices broke the silence of our secluded room. In the castle opposite the windows gleamed brightly every night, but there was evidently something wrong, for Prince Otto was no longer his old self ; his box at the theatre remained empty, his tent at the Schützen Park remained empty, and the pretty Rodenberg maidens donned their most becoming costumes in vain. Prince Otto eschewed society ; all intercourse between him and the towns-people was cut off.

“What does he do then ?” they asked of one another.

“He reads, he paints, he’s in a bad humor,” said Anita to us.

“What about ?” inquired grandmother. Anita shrugged her shoulders and made no reply.

“Is he not going away soon ?” I asked.

“Has no thought of it,” rejoined the little Italian ; “his library arrived day before yesterday.”

Something is wrong then, I thought to myself,

and looked over at Lotta, who, however, never raised her eyes from her Italian grammar.

"There is something wrong," said grandmother, as she started in to read the editorial in her newspaper a second time. Presently she laid down her paper and launched out into a long and circumstantial discussion of the house of Hohenzollern, of Spain, and of Napoleon III.

I listened very inattentively, for my thoughts were with Lotta and Fritz. At length there came a day which I can never forget.

Lotta had risen early and taken her seat on the balcony. It had rained the night before, and the heavens were darkened with heavy, gray clouds. The girl had wrapped herself in a soft, warm shawl as if she were cold; she held Schnips on her lap. When I brought her her breakfast she looked up at me with such dull, languid eyes that I was frightened.

"Lotta," I said, "you are ill?"

"I believe I am," she answered.

"What is wrong with you, dear? speak," I said anxiously.

"Come inside," she replied.

And when we stood inside the room, she said, in curt, hard tones: "It has got to end. I cannot bear it any longer; I cannot keep my word to Fritz Roden."

Now it was out.

“Lotta!”

“I cannot do it,” she repeated firmly.

And as I remained silent, she continued, in a quiet voice: “I have never loved him. I thought it would be so easy, and did not know what I was doing when I said yes. I thought I could not support such a miserable existence as we are now leading, and, indeed, I could not have supported it, and then there was Hans—I hoped to save him. You know what I mean, Helena.”

She put her arm caressingly on my shoulder, but I pushed her away from me and covered my face with my hands; bitter tears ran down my cheeks.

“Well, speak anyway!” she cried impatiently.

“Oh, you are terrible!” I sobbed.

“How so?” she said. “Good heavens! is it because at the last moment I have the courage to confess the truth? From day to day I have hoped that he would throw my ring at my feet in honest anger; but he would not do it, and now I must cut the knot. I can’t endure it any longer. I am disgusted with this farce. Go to him, Helena, tell him the truth. Make me as bad as you will or can, but bring me my freedom, and bring it to me forthwith.”

She had spoken in a loud voice.

"I cannot do it," I replied in deep distress.

I thought of his true, honest eyes and his sad face. No, I could not do it! I turned to close the door, that grandmother might not hear our conversation.

"But I can do it," said a trembling voice, and in the doorway we saw the pale face of Fritz's mother. The old lady stepped into the room, which was only faintly lighted, and stood before us. Lotta hung her head before her for the first time.

"I can do it, Charlotte," she repeated, "and I will do it at once!"

She ceased speaking, and the stillness of death reigned in the little room. We heard only the quick breathing of the mother, who wished to speak, but could not for her pain. Then suddenly she turned and went away without a word, through the next room and down the stairs.

As Frau Roden left the room, I felt myself overcome with despair.

"Lotta," I moaned, "Lotta, do reflect. There is yet time. Call her back. Say that you have spoken too quickly. You cannot be so horribly cruel and hard. You have always kept your word; do not make me so unhappy."

"For that very reason I will break this engagement," she said firmly and coldly.

I ran to the balcony. The indignant mother was far on her way home. Her step was not hesitating or slow, but brisk and firm, as if she feared a recall. Never in my life have I felt more unhappy and humiliated than in that hour. This was our gratitude for the benefits we had received.

Lotta remained calm ; she began to make her toilet. Her hands trembled a little and a faint, red glow marked her cheeks. She breathed deeply and freely, as if a mountain had been lifted from her heart. When she was dressed she came over to grandmother.

“Grandmother,” she said in a firm voice, “I have broken off my engagement.”

The old lady looked at her with a dazed air.

“Do not jest on such a subject,” she said severely.

“I am not jesting. I cannot marry him.”

“Why not?”

“I do not love him.”

“And what right had you then to go through all this farce?” cried the venerable old lady, and her eyes flashed fire. “Do you think you can play with an honest man’s heart as you would with your dog? Oh, no, child, I have a word to say on that subject. If you in childish wantonness have spoken an unjustifiable word, go at

once to your lover and beg his pardon. At once !”

The trembling woman raised herself almost out of her chair and pointed imperiously toward the door. And with all her severity, it was plain to read in her old eyes the expression of a nameless fear.

“Grandmother,” said Lotta, almost beside herself, “you cannot wish that? You dare not wish that?”

“I wish you to keep the pledge which you have freely given,” came the answer. “Go !”

“I go, but I shall not come again,” replied the girl in a threatening tone; “before I would marry him, I would rather die.”

“Go !” repeated the old lady a second time.

Lotta turned away defiantly, but before she reached the door, before I could hasten after her, the coachman had entered and handed her a little package. She grasped it eagerly and tore it open. As she did so her ring fell from the paper on to the floor, and rolled over to my feet.

“Too late,” moaned grandmother, and sank back in her chair, burying her grief-stricken face in the cushions. I stooped, picked up the ring, and placed it on the bureau.

An hour later I determined to go over to the mansion house. I felt that I must speak a kind



word to its sorely injured inmates ; but my heart was sore afraid. I feared they would turn me out with hatred and contempt because of my sister's acts. As I reached the garden gate, I saw Anita standing on the other side with her hand on the latch. Sure enough this was Italian day.

"I do not believe that my sister will be prepared to-day to—" I stammered.

She looked at me inquiringly, and then said :

"I will ask. I can go away again if it is not convenient."

I hastened on to the Roden house. Frau Roden was standing in the hall as quietly as if nothing had happened, watching a girl pour out the foaming milk. She did not see me until I was quite near, but she held out her hand at once. Then she pointed to his chamber door, laid her finger on her lips and led me upstairs. I followed her into the room which we had occupied on our first night in Rotenberg.

"He might come into my room down stairs," she explained, "and he could not bear to see you to-day."

She drew me over toward a small sofa which stood between the windows.

"Tell me," I begged, "how he bears it."

She had overcome her emotion by this time, yet at my words the tears ran down her cheeks,

“He had seen it coming, of course,” she said, “but nevertheless— At first he wanted to go over to her; he could not realize what had happened. Now he has shut himself in his room. I can say nothing, for in such moments all consolation is empty and vain. After a while he sent David over; he brought her the ring, did he not?”

I answered in the affirmative.

“It is ended now,” she said. “Why must this all have happened? His whole heart was bound up in her.”

As she spoke she sprang to her feet. “That was his voice; he is calling for his horse.”

We stood breathless by the half open door and listened. He was speaking calmly to old Müller, the overseer: only a few words reached us where we stood.

“The news—Benedetti—never heard the like before—war will be upon us before we know it.”

“Suits me well enough,” we heard the overseer answer.

“It is easy for him to talk,” whispered the old lady, “for his years will keep him safe at home.”

The next instant we heard Fritz’s reply:

“It suits me too, Müller, very well.”

In a few minutes more we heard the sound of his horse’s hoofs, as he rode away. I hastened

to the window, and watched him ride down the street and past our house, calm and erect as ever. His mother followed his course with moist and shining eyes.

“God be praised,” said I, “he seems calm.”

“He seems,” replied she; “you do not know my boy.”

After a short pause she added: “There goes the first news of the breach out to the world,” pointing to Anita, who was hurrying along under the chestnuts. “Phew! that will be a sweet morsel for the gossips, and his highness, too, will not be sorry to hear it.”

“The prince?” I said indignantly; “what difference does it make to him?” The old lady laid her hand on my shoulder.

“God grant that it may not end in tears.”

“But Lotta is not thinking of him, I assure you.”

She turned away without an answer, pressed my hand silently, and as she saw the tears in my eyes, she tapped me softly on the cheek.

“We shall remain good friends, my dear; I am not one of those who visit their resentment upon the innocent. Come over often; and take a greeting from me now to my old friend Frau von Werthern.”

“Do you think this talk about the war is serious?” I asked.

“God’s will be done,” she answered. “I fear the worst.”

When I reached our rooms again, I found Lotta sitting at the window in the front room; she did not move, and I passed her by and went over to where grandmother was sitting. Grandmother’s jewel casket lay open before her, and she was looking at a pair of splendid diamond earrings.

“This is the last,” she whispered, and the gems glittered coldly in her trembling hand. “Pack them up, Helena, and send them to Friedberg & Sons, Unter den Linden; and there is the letter which is to accompany them. I have written it very badly, for my old arms are very lame.”

“What do you mean to do, grandmother?” I asked fearfully.

I knew the earrings: they were a souvenir of the days of youth and happiness: the old lady never looked at them without tears.

“They were a present from my husband the day the boy was born,” she had frequently explained to us.

“The boy” was my father, and he was lying now in the churchyard at Berlin. But these

stones had always possessed the power to bring back as by a charm the fairest hour in her life—when father lay in his cradle, a crowing, laughing babe, and grandmother's dear old face, so faded and wrinkled now, was fresh and bright and young, and wreathed with happy smiles for husband and child.

“What do you mean to do?”

“Pay back to Fritz Roden the sum which he advanced to Hans. What does he care for Hans?”

“He will be hurt,” I interposed.

“I will not accept alms,” she replied proudly. “Lotta herself has begged me to do it.”

I did as she bade me; but as I looked at her face I saw that her features were terribly distorted: the marks of care, torturing, agonizing care and fear.

“What will become of you and Lotta?” she whispered. “And then the clouds which threaten us from France. When you come back, Helena, I want you to read the paper to me. The king is in Berlin, the city is in the greatest excitement. Thiers has spoken for peace; as if that could do any good. I am awfully afraid, Helena. I thought once I should die happy if I could know our country once more victorious over the French, who have done us so much harm. But

now I want to die in peace. Yet I shall never live to see the end of the struggle."

"Oh, grandmother," I pleaded, "do not speak so." I could think of nothing to say which would comfort her. I sealed the package, and pursuant to her wish I was about to take it myself to the post-office, when my eyes rested on Lotta. She was still at the window; her handkerchief was in her hand, and she was waving a greeting to some one outside. As I cast an astonished glance out of the window and across to the castle I caught a glimpse of a retiring form, behind which the heavy curtains fell together.

"Lotta!" I cried reproachfully.

She turned about, and for a moment there played upon her girlish face a rosy, happy smile; then her look changed, and her features settled into the old hard, severe expression.

"What do you wish?" she asked sullenly.

"Nothing," I exclaimed, and hurried past her into the street. As I went my way I kept saying to myself, "No, no; it is impossible; it is impossible. I must have made a mistake."

That evening the castle windows remained dark; but about ten o'clock a wagon rattled through our street, and I fancied that some one waved a handkerchief toward our windows.

That night I wanted to ask Lotta frankly if I had been making a mistake, or if I had really seen what I thought I had observed. But when I entered our bed-chamber she was already slumbering, and her lips were wreathed with an unconscious smile. I did not rouse her, but went back to grandmother, who was wakeful and wanted me to read to her. The old lady lay propped up in her pillows with her hands folded on her breast. Her pale lips moved but slightly.

“God grant that it may all come out right. May he watch over our king and country,” she said at last, as I ceased reading from sheer exhaustion. “We are on the eve of great events, and there is coming a time of mighty deeds and terrible suffering, Helena; but remember what I say—the victory will be ours, the victory will be ours!”

I looked at her questioningly, for I had read almost mechanically; my thoughts were with Lotta. The words had fallen from my lips like empty sounds. But I remembered now; it was war that threatened us. And I remembered, too, how on that very morning Fritz had hailed the awful tidings with delight, for he wished to forget.

Toward morning a violent storm swept over the town. A terrible clap of thunder aroused



both Lotta and myself. The rain rattled sharply on the tin roof of the balcony and against the window frames. I arose and prepared to go in to grandmother, for she was always terrified by a storm. I had to pass close by Lotta's bed, and as I did so she opened her eyes and gave me a bright look from underneath her long lashes ; then she put out her hand and laid hold of my gown.

"Helena, are you angry with me?" And as I looked at her with an earnest face, she loosed her hold and said : "Oh, you are so different from me ; so rational, so cold, so eternally calm and self-contained. Did your heart ever beat so fast, Helena, that you could not breathe? Were you ever fairly dizzy with sheer joy and happiness?"

"Let me go," I cried, irritated and incensed. "Perhaps I may understand you some time, but I cannot comprehend you now. I am too sad and care-oppressed. Now let me go to grandmother ; she was so greatly excited yesterday."

"I shall get up, too," Lotta called after me. "I fancy that this rain will have brought all the roses in the garden to full bloom." Her voice sounded so fresh and joyous ; it had not such a ring for a long time.

The old lady was still sleeping. Motionless she lay in her pillows just as I had left her the night before. Another terrible crash of thunder

shook the house to its foundation, but she neither opened her eyes nor moved. I crept softly to her bed and bent over her. Her countenance as she lay cushioned in the downy pillows was strangely white and calm. In speechless terror I seized her hand—it was cold as ice. That was not sleep! I gave a piercing scream of horror and despair, and fell upon the floor. We were alone in the world—absolutely alone. Lotta, hearing my cry, came running into the room in her night-dress. Her frightened eyes took in at a glance the horrible truth. “Dead!” she cried, and a nervous shudder seized her frame.

“Dead, dead,” I sobbed, “and it is your fault. Our only protection, our only refuge.”

This time Lotta was the stronger, and showed the greater self-control.

“Helena, be calm. Give me your hand and get up; we are not unprotected. Do not look at the darkest side alone.” As she spoke she stepped across my prostrate form, and bent her warm young face over the wrinkled hand of the dead.

“Grandmother, forgive me!”

While I lay on the floor by the dead like one destroyed, Lotta hastened to dress. Soon I heard her send the charwoman over to Anita

with the news of our loss. A short time afterward the little Italian appeared in the chamber of death.

Lotta and she lifted me up and brought me into our bedroom. I felt the cologne water with which they bathed my temples, and drank mechanically the black coffee which Lotta offered to me. Then, as if in a dream, I heard her say:

“See to it, Anita, that the letter goes off at once.”

“Certainly, Fräulein. You need not trouble yourself about anything. I will care for everything. Just now I will open the windows in the other room and set things to rights there. I will bring some flowers from the garden, and arrange your poor grandmother just as you would wish. And if you should desire to give any orders for the mourning or for the coffin——”

At this point I lifted my head from the couch.

“You shall not touch Frau von Werthern,” I cried.

“But, Helena,” said Lotta soothingly, “you cannot possibly attend to everything.” But without heeding her words I rose and went into grandmother’s room and closed the door behind me. They did not attempt to follow me, and I sat down by the bedside of the woman who had been the only mother I had ever known, over-

come by the thought that with her death, Lotta and I had lost the last stay of our young lives.

I had been there quite a while when my revery was broken by the touch of a soft hand on my shoulder. "Poor child," said the gentle voice of Frau Roden. "My dear, good old friend." And she stroked the wrinkled cheeks of the dead with a loving hand. She laid a linen handkerchief over the sightless eyes, and crossed the listless hands upon the breast whose heaving was all past now; then she smoothed out the folds of the coverlid, and turning to me, said:

"Come, Helena, I will draw the curtains and open the window yonder. Come out of this close room. Your grandmother will sleep on here peacefully and still, for she has passed into that rest which brings surcease of sorrow and relief from care. Let us go over into your bed-chamber; we will be alone there."

As we passed through the sitting-room Lotta sat at the desk, writing. Anita was bustling about in heavy crape already. Great God! It must be so! Happy are they who, in such an hour, can preserve an undisturbed exterior. On reaching my room, I sank into a chair like one benumbed.

"Keep your courage up, my dear Helena,"

said Frau Roden. "Remember that your grandmother was very old, and it was quite natural that she should at last close her eyes in death."

She said no more, for she must have felt that her words contained no comfort for me.

"It is too much for me to bear," I burst forth, "too much ; and all at once. What will become of Lottà ? O Lotta !"

"God will not desert either of you, Helena."

"Yes, yes ; if God would only give me that assurance himself, loud and clear." But no answer came from the upper world in response to my despairing cry, "What now ?"

We sat together a long time, and then my visitor arose.

"I will go now, Helena," she whispered, "and take charge of everything ; the last rites for the dead, and food for the living."

She broke off suddenly as Lotta opened the door and put her head into the room.

"Helena, what do you think ; shall we fix the burial for the 19th of July ?" she asked.

I raised my head and thought a moment ; it was then the 17th.

"So soon ?" said I.

"There's no reason for delay, Helena. Set a day yourself if you're not suited ; the undertaker must know,"

As she spoke I became aware of the presence of that functionary behind her.

Frau Roden's countenance wore an expression of infinite astonishment. I gave a silent nod of assent, and Lotta disappeared.

"I see I am not needed here, Helena." The old lady's voice trembled as she spoke; "Anita is managing everything; but, Helena, if you want a word of good cheer at any time come over to us." She stroked my cheek with her hand once or twice, and went away.

Lotta acted for me in everything. That evening we were sitting in the living-room; the candles had not been lighted, and neither of us spoke a word. After a while Lotta began to wander restlessly about the room; her dark form glided noiselessly across the floor from side to side like the spirit of the night.

"I wish you'd say something," she broke out at length.

"I am very sad and fearful," I said.

"Oh, matters will brighten for us soon."

"Where do you get this courage, Lotta?" said I; "we are worse off than the beggars in the street."

"*Nous verrons!*" she replied; "I do not despair so easily."

"You have trifled away our only refuge."

“Oh, there’s more than one refuge for us ; I am not afraid.” Her voice rang out so clear and confident. Involuntarily I asked again : “What’s the secret of your courage ?”

But as she made no reply, I continued : “I have no fear on my own account ; when I am forty years of age, you know, I will get my pension, and until then I can support myself by my own labor. But you, Lotta ! How can you go among strangers ? Service is so hard !”

“I ?” Her voice sounded as if she were amused, but she said no more, and recommenced her walk. From time to time she arrested her steps at the open window as if listening for something. The hours crept slowly by, and the clock in the castle tower struck eleven.

“Come,” I said, “let’s go to bed ; perhaps we shall find relief in sleep.”

“No, I cannot sleep for a long time yet,” she replied hastily ; “remain up with me, Helena, I beg you, please do.”

I leaned my head back and fixed my eyes again on the thin ray of light which came in through the door of the room where grandmother lay.

“A corpse is so terribly uncanny in the house ; one seems always to hear a breathing or a groaning or a rustling. Do you hear nothing ?” whispered Lotta.



“Yes,” I said, “but it is imagination.”

“Oh, no, no, there’s a wagon coming! Listen! I knew I could not be mistaken.” She hastened to the window and leaned far out on the sill.

I heard a wagon drive past at a rapid pace, and in a few seconds the noise died out; the vehicle had probably reached its destination.

“What is the matter with you, Lotta?” I asked, seeing that she continued to peer out into the darkness. I went over and sat down beside her and took hold of her hand. She made no answer, but I felt that she was trembling, and that her breathing was heavy. She seemed to be looking intently at the castle. Presently a low light gleamed through the curtains of the prince’s apartments, then the curtains were thrown back and a man’s form appeared before the open window. Lotta was motionless as a statue. Then there was a sound like the clapping of hands, the curtains fell together and the form disappeared.

“Helena! Helena!” whispered Lotta, as she flung her arm about my neck. “O Helena!” Then she drew me into the room, forced me down upon the sofa, fell upon her knees before me, and buried her hot face in my lap.

“Do not grieve, dear, do not be anxious; all will be well!”

In a moment I remembered the words of Frau Roden : "How glad his highness will be to learn of Lotta's freedom." Could it be possible that she was right ?

"For God's sake, Lotta, what do you mean? Lotta, that would be horrible!"

"I do not know what you are thinking of," she replied excitedly ; "do not ask me any questions, and do not be cast down. I am not an object of pity, be sure of that!"

"Lotta," I said, taking her hand, "I can work, and I will care for you if you'll promise me——"

"I will promise nothing!" she said proudly. "I say to you again I will be no burden to you. I would rather go to America to Hans ; but say no more, I am not in the least desperate."

She lit a candle and went into our sleeping-room, and began to prepare for bed.

I remained alone in the dark chamber. My thoughts busied themselves ceaselessly with our future. What should we do? Should we go back to Berlin? Where else could we go? Lotta would find a home in the house of her guardian, and I—well, I was not anxious for myself. At last, overcome by fatigue, I gave up the attempt to solve the problem. I arose, felt my way through the dark rooms, and threw myself on the bed without undressing.



## CHAPTER VI.

I WOKE on the following morning with a heavy heart and an aching head ; a terrible burden had fallen upon me.

I raised myself in bed, and saw a ray of sunlight coming in through the curtains. Lotta had made her bed and left me alone, and in the adjoining room I heard a low voice which I recognized as Anita's. I thought there was a certain humility in its tones, which I had never recognized before. After a time I went in to join them. Lotta was standing already dressed before her writing-table, her head was resting upon it ; she was evidently thinking deeply ; she spoke no word, however, but only nodded her head to me as I came in.

Anita had disappeared.

Oh, the oppressive stillness, the suffocating feeling of the room, in spite of the cool morning air ! Near Lotta's teacup lay a bouquet of orange blossoms, and its heavy, rich perfume made my head ache worse.

The morning was passed by us in absolute

silence ; I had not a particle of energy, and lay passively on the sofa. Lotta wrote ; I thought of nothing, I only wanted quiet. Once I heard heavy steps in the next room, and whispers—the coffin had been brought. I had not the heart to look again at the still, placid face.

Meanwhile, on this self-same morning, the storm—that fearful and destructive storm which was to command the interest and attention of the entire world, was gathering.

Men deserted their various callings, and stood on the street corners discussing the “declaration of war” which might come at any moment.

From house to house and from heart to heart flew the one thought :

“The old enemy. To defeat him, we will lay once more our all upon our country’s altar ; not our worldly possessions alone, but our very heart’s blood.”

None thought of individual griefs ; had they not all one common trouble? Would they not all unite to protect the Fatherland from the blow which had been struck at her honor? Ah, had one been able to wander unseen through the towns and villages of Germany during this dreadful summer, and have entered the houses or huts, how much noble self-sacrifice, how much enthu-

siasm, what great magnanimity he would have witnessed ! And yet I sat there in a stupor, and could hardly understand it at all.

War : really war. What did it mean ? Tears and suffering, suffering and tears ! Was there not enough sorrow already ? That was all it was possible for me to comprehend then.

The day went by as all days, no matter how weary, do, and on the next was the funeral.

At eleven o'clock I heard them carrying the coffin down the stairs, and knew it would be borne through the garden to meet the hearse at the carriage road. I had shut myself up in the only place where I could be unmolested and hear little, the kitchen ; the only sound that came to my ear was the church bell, which Frau Roden had ordered to be tolled. And mixed with this peaceful and solemn sound the cry was echoing : " To arms ! War is declared ! " I knew nothing of it until Lotta rushed into my room. The pastor coming from the burial had brought the news. She was very pale, and trembling in every limb, and was wringing her hands while she told me. Her very glance seemed to rouse me from my lethargy.

" Helena, it is fearful ! " she gasped.

I followed her into the living-room, where the clergyman was still standing. From the streets

I could hear the sharp cries arousing every one to action.

“You will think less of your sorrow, with this universal calamity upon us all,” said the old man; “you must do your part; a common cause brings with it much trust, much friendliness.”

After he had gone I went up to Lotta and put my arms around her; she was greatly agitated, and I could feel how her heart beat as she again whispered:

“It is fearful! I had believed up to this day that the storms would pass over.”

“Do not be so alarmed, Lotta,” I said; “we are together, we have each other!” She trembled so violently that her fear brought my old courage back to me. “We are the daughters of a soldier,” I said, freeing my arms from hers and standing in front of her, “and we have both known much sorrow—and have none to lose. If our father was alive, or Hans was here——”

She hardly heeded a word I said, but leaned against the door as if for support, with her hands pressed to her heart; after a time she turned back to the window again. Plainly she was under the influence of some deep emotion of which I knew nothing.

Then we heard steps on the stairs outside and a knock at the door; it was Anita, all breathless.

Her glance sought Lotta's, but Lotta gave no answering sign : apparently they would have had much to say to one another if my presence had not checked them.

“You know it already,” she began at last, in an embarrassed manner. “The war—also that his highness will start immediately.” I did not see Lotta's countenance, for she had turned away ; but my heart seemed lighter after I heard it, and I rose softly and left the room. No matter what terror the news of war had brought, it was a blessing to hear it had hastened the prince's departure, especially if he had had any tender feeling for Lotta. I was surprised when Anita ran rapidly across the garden to the castle a moment later. I went back to Lotta at once, and found her standing in the middle of the room with her hands over her face.

“What is the matter with you, Lotta?” I asked.

As I spoke she dropped her arms, and I saw traces of tears in her eyes ; her mouth seemed drawn, and although a half smile played around it, there was a set, pained expression also.

But Lotta answered nothing, and I had no thought of the events that were so soon to crowd upon me. I gave no further thought to our future during that hour ; what mattered our



isolated grief at such a time. The old woman that came in to prepare our simple dinner never murmured, although she had three sons, who must all go, and the eldest had a wife and children, and a little business of his own.

As she put the dishes on the table she said :

“Herr Roden has just called the people together in the court-yard, and made a speech to them. He is going, too,” she added, turning to look at Lotta with a not altogether friendly glance. “And no one can tell who will come back.”

Ah, he !—I had not thought of him to-day, but I looked at Lotta as the old servant ceased speaking. Would not her heart throb with remorse ? Would she let him go without one word, without a prayer for his forgiveness ? But Lotta said not a word. She sat at the table supporting her head with her hand and eating nothing.

From the streets we heard shouts of “Down with the French !” and war-cries echoing on all sides, but no word was spoken in our silent room. I sat at the window, and Lotta at her escritoire.

She looked hastily through all the drawers, tore up some letters and tied others together, but I could not understand why. I attempted once or twice to speak of Fritz Roden, but gave it up,

finally, for I did not know how to begin. Once or twice she turned around as if she had something to say to me, and once she rose and came to the window beside me, but she did not speak ; I could tell that something was agitating her, for the color came and went in her cheeks. She did not look once toward the castle windows, although the prince appeared at them several times.

“ I am almost choking,” she said at last ; “ I wish it were evening.”

Toward dusk I rose and asked her if she would not accompany me to the church-yard ?

“ To-morrow ! to-morrow ! ” she repeated. “ Leave me alone to-day ; I will go in the garden for a little fresh air.” And as I stepped out of the door she came hastily after me.

“ Helena ! ”

I thought she had something important to tell me from her excited manner, but she only said :

“ When you are praying at the grave do not forget me ! When will you be back ? ”

“ I hardly know, Lotta—soon.”

And so we parted. Lotta had never made a confidante of me. She only trusted her own will.

The noise and bustle without was in great con-

trast to our quiet house of mourning. Many horses were standing in the court-yard, and I could hear Fritz Roden's voice giving orders to the stable boys, who ran hither and thither ; and the old shepherd, who remembered the war of 1813, was holding forth to a small audience in front of the kitchen windows. I hurried across the court as rapidly as possible.

In the streets all was noise and confusion : wives lamenting anxiously and sorrowfully, husbands preparing actively for they hardly knew what, and children singing stirring songs of the Fatherland.

But all was quiet in the little church-yard. I remained for a long time by the newly-made grave, and when I turned my face toward home it had grown quite dark.

The town was still excited, tumultuous bands were playing, and loud " Hurrahs ! " were shouted on every corner ; but by this time all had grown quiet in our little street. I threw a glance at the castle windows where lights glimmered behind the drawn curtains ; but opposite, in our rooms, all was dark. Lotta, I fancied, was sitting yet at the window waiting for me.

Then the thought came to me suddenly, what was it Anita had wanted to-day at dinner time ? Whether the prince had desired to come over to

see her again ! It would have been painful if he had come and found her alone ; but that was hardly possible. He was a gentleman and would not intrude upon our grief the very day of the burial. He had evidently sent a formal message of sympathy when he sent the magnificent bouquet, that was all.

Poor Lotta, waiting for me, and so lonely !

I hastened my steps and opened the door, breathless.

“ Pardon me, Lotta ! ” I said, as I entered the dark room ; “ I have been out too long.”

No answer.

I opened our bedroom door.

“ Lotta ! ” I cried. No sound.

“ Lotta ! ” and I called out into the garden—in vain. A fearful anxiety came over me. I stepped back into the living-room, and with trembling fingers struck a light.

In the centre of the table lay a letter addressed :

“ To my sister.”

And a moment later my startled eyes read these few words :

“ I am to become Prince Otto’s wife this evening, as he leaves for the capital in the morning. The marriage will take place at eight o’clock, in his own apartments. I had not the courage to tell you to-day at noon, for I could not

have conversed quietly about the matter, and the hours of happiness for us two alone were drawing rapidly to a close.

“Forgive your

“LOTTA.”

That was the note. How blind—how stupidly blind I had been until now! Lotta seemed to be standing before me again, and in a clearer light than ever before; her thoughtlessness, her frivolity, her selfishness, seemed to me extreme at this moment. Prince Otto, then, was the man who had supplanted her old betrothed in her heart, while she yet carried Fritz Roden’s ring upon her finger; and she had veered like a weathercock, and gone over to the prince and his palace across the way. And to-day of all days—to-day!

I was still standing with the letter in my trembling hand, when the door opened slowly and Fritz Roden entered. He came directly to me, and gave me his hand. The flickering candle threw a faint ray across his face, and it seemed to me to be so changed in expression that I could hardly believe it was he; or was it the uniform which he wore which effected so great an alteration?

“I have come to say farewell, Fräulein Helena,” he said, “to you and Charlotte. It is

better to part in peace, when one goes the way which I shall tread. I start to-night in order to catch the express at T. To-morrow at ten I shall be with my regiment."

He had been looking quietly around the room as he spoke, and now gave me a questioning glance. But as I remained dumb and held on to the back of the nearest chair for support, he said :

"I thank you, Fräulein von Werthern. I have not much time now to talk, and I had much to say to you—much to thank you for."

He hesitated. "Your sister and yourself stand so entirely alone," he began, after a time.

I could control myself no longer, and the bitterness of my heart was told in the cry :

"Alone?"

"Yes, quite alone." And then the tears came thick and fast, the first I had shed since my grandmother's death. In a few minutes he knew it all—the whole story. And then there was a moment of terrible silence, broken only by his hard breathing.

"You cannot remain here," he said at last, quite angrily; "I shall take you to my mother."

I shook my head, but he repeated "You must come," so decidedly and quietly now, that I followed him as if I possessed no will of my own. So we went across the garden together in the

still, summer night ; the air was heavy with perfume ; in the distance we heard the maids and men singing softly, and overhead the stars seemed to keep a peaceful and holy watch ; only in the heart of man were strife and distress. One moment he remained standing listening to the significant words of the soldier-song borne to us on the breeze.

Was he thinking of that evening when he had come to meet Lotta, and they had stood side by side and listened to the nightingale's songs ? I could not tell. He passed his hands over his eyes, and then went on as before, and when we arrived at the door of the great living-room, opened it for me as quietly and as courteously as ever, and bade me enter. His mother looked up surprised from the small trunk which she was packing.

“ Mother, I have brought you Helena,” he said, and left us alone.

I went to her and flung my arms around her neck, and cried as though my heart would break. And when I was able to tell her all, she held me from her at arm's length, as if she feared I had lost my senses.

“ Lotta—married !” She faltered. “ Does he know—all ? Poor boy ! This to bear also !”



Then she shook her head and began questioningly :

“So sudden? Married, you say? To-day? Anita was the go-between, of course! Did he get the duchess’s consent to-day? Certainly he is the idol of his mother, and possibly she may be rejoiced to know he is under some restraint. And the haste! And I hear five couples have been married since the news of war came. Ah, Helena, I cannot comprehend it! But I must go to my Fritz.”

Before she had reached the door he entered the room. We both looked anxiously at him, but he sat down at the table very quietly and calmly.

“Send the trunk away,” he begged his mother, “and let us be comfortable for our last few hours together. Fraülein Helena, you will remain with my mother, if it is not too great a sacrifice; the old lady is quite alone.”

I reached out my hand to him in assent, for I could not speak; surely no lonely, forsaken woman could have had a better place of refuge.

“I thank you,” he said; “I can go now with a quiet heart.”

So we sat in the comfortable sitting-room; the Rhine wine sparkled in the old Venetian decanter upon the table, and everything was as homelike and hospitable looking as ever.

“It may be that we shall be as happy as ever, when we meet again,” he said, as he turned to his mother. And then he talked to her of this and that matter concerning the estate, and left directions that we knew were only given when the thought forced itself upon him that he might never return to carry them out himself. All at once we heard the sound of music, and the flash of torches gleamed in through the windows as the Reserves of the little town went to serenade Prince Otto.

How clearly it sounded to us: “A mighty fortress is our God!” Then there were loud cries for the prince and shouts for the ducal family, and lastly a song that was echoing that night in a million German hearts. It was the “Watch on the Rhine.”

“Dear Fatherland, may peace be thine!”

Frau Roden’s heavy eyes lighted up.

“Let us not think of our private woes,” she said to me. “Cease your weeping, Helena! there is something sublime about a whole nation in arms!” And she looked up proudly at her “boy,” although her old heart was almost breaking. He was the last!

I did not want to disturb the mother and son in their last few moments together, so I went back to our old rooms to fasten the windows and

draw the curtains. I crept through the darkness to the window and buried my face in my handkerchief. "Lotta, ah, Lotta!"

Everything was silent now, and the castle opposite was apparently without light or life. Soon I heard a wagon coming quickly; it stopped for a moment near my window, and a voice called:

"Farewell, Helena!"

But I could not answer; I sank on my knees and laid my aching brow on the marble window-seat; at last my grief overpowered me. Wild and violent were my sobs as I thought of his misery and of my own, and how hopeless and aimless my life would be for the future.





## CHAPTER VIII.

“My lady, the countess, begs the gracious Fräulein to come over to her, this evening at dusk,” was the message Anita brought to me a day later, as I sat sorting out my grandmother’s papers and getting them in order. My head was heavy and my heart still heavier.

To-day, at Frau Roden’s suggestion, I was striving to get everything settled preparatory to going over to the great house; but there was much about which I could not decide until I had consulted with Lotta. “The countess?” I asked, puzzled.

“Countess Charlotte Kaltensee, the wife of his Highness the Prince,” explained Anita, in a monotone.

“Ah—my sister! Say to her that I will be with her. Has his highness gone?”

“An hour ago,” she answered; “the countess is heart-broken.” And Anita departed.

I went on with what I was doing; I could not bring myself to cast one glance toward the windows of Lotta’s new home. When it was

dark I went across to her, but I must admit without any friendly feeling in my heart.

Anita opened the door for me, and led me through the dimly-lighted hall and along the corridor to the same room in which I had been before, and where I had first seen Prince Otto. We went through into one of the smaller rooms. "Please turn to the left and go into the yellow salon," whispered Anita, and disappeared.

My heart beat violently as I stood before the portières, and for a moment I felt faint and dizzy; perhaps 'twas the heavy perfume of roses and orange blossoms that pervaded the princely apartments. With trembling hand I drew aside the heavy silk curtains and stepped into the room.

It was a large salon, with many lamps shedding their rays over rich furniture, and giving through their reflection in the mirrors a golden sheen to everything.

Fine paintings richly framed adorned the walls, and a soft velvet carpet in subdued colors covered the floor. And yonder, on a couch under a great picture, lay Lotta, her face buried in a pillow and a rich scarf thrown over her.

She had not heard me enter.

Her long black hair hung in disorder over her white lace *negligée*; she had worn the same gown

one night in private theatricals, when she had enacted the part of a young wife of rank ; it had a hateful significance which made me feel more bitter than ever. It seemed to me to be all comedy.

“Lotta !” I called.

Then she sat up, and I gazed into her lovely, tear-stained face.

“Helena,” she said like a child, “do remain with me !”

She came over to me and threw her arms around my neck and laid her burning cheek upon my shoulder.

“I am so happy, so happy, Helena !” she whispered ; “forgive me, and tell me that God will not be so cruel as not to let him return to me ! You speak no word, Helena ! Have you no word of kindness, no wish for my happiness to give me ?” she asked, looking at me. “If you knew how I love him, you would not stand with so unforgiving a look, Helena. Are you angry with me ?” she continued, and took her hands from my shoulder, “because I did not confide in you ? But it was all so sudden—you know. On the day that I broke my engagement he had news that the war was inevitable, and then—with the storm about to burst I gave him my ‘yes.’ Then he went to get his mother’s con-

sent. The unseemly haste which made me seem to you so unsympathetic was forced upon me by the war ; I was opposed to it, but what could I do ? When one loves as I do, and knows not when the loved one will return again, if ever, all lesser obstacles disappear. To be sure," she continued impatiently after a pause, "every one would not have acted so, but only because they knew nothing of that great passion—love !"

"Ah," I said, and I spoke with difficulty, "but there is something more to be thought of, when a woman gives her heart to one man with the betrothal ring of another on her finger."

"Ah, Helena," she answered compassionately, "what do you know about it ? Any way we won't discuss it any farther. You can, perhaps, see that I never loved Fritz, and that I love," she added tenderly, "my husband unspeakably."

"Then how did you dare accept Fritz Roden's proposal ?"

"But," she cried sharply, "I did not know Otto then. I gave Herr Roden my promise in order to save us both from starvation."

"Oh, this is frightful, Lotta !"

"My God ! it is what we learn from contact with the world, Helena. I might have become contented in time, and have submitted tamely to the solid bürger, about as I did to the eternal



potato salad which you insisted upon giving us a couple of times a week. But then I saw him, and I loved him from the first day, yes, from the first hour. You remember that morning? And there——”

“ You should have gone to Fritz Roden immediately and told him all.”

“ Yes, but I did not know then whether the prince——”

“ Oh, I understand,” I interrupted bitterly; “ so you decided to wait. But when this changeable, gay butterfly was caught, you trampled the honest bürger’s trustful heart under foot,—you had done with him ! ”

“ I beg you, Helena, to be sensible and listen to me,” she cried impatiently. “ We are entirely alone in the world, without means, and it was my duty to grasp the helping hand that was extended to us.” And as I remained silent she continued: “ And that is what I wished to speak with you about to-night; Otto wishes you to remain with me. I shall occupy these apartments until he takes me away; Castle Kaltensee is not yet in readiness for my reception; it is in Bavaria, where the duke has great possessions. It is to be my future residence; and, as you know, I take that name. It has all been so sudden. I feel as if I were in a dream. I have a most liberal allowance

of pin-money, which is for us both ; what a piece of good luck, Helena ! ”

She had thrown herself, while speaking, in a low arm-chair opposite me.

“ Ah, Helena, this terrible war ! ” she sighed. “ And only to think I had no bridal dress, and had to be married in that old white cashmere, and the pastor made the service as short as possible, and did not seem to take any interest whatever in it ; all the fault of this horrible war. There were only two witnesses present : a young nobleman from C., and one of the gentlemen-in-waiting to the duchess. Anita wove me a wreath of myrtle blossoms, but if it had not been for the diamonds which he gave me no one would have imagined I was a prince’s bride. But why don’t you speak, Helena ? Take a glass of wine and some fruit. The table is still laid in the dining-room for our only and last dinner, and the viands have hardly been touched. Ah, Helena, I could neither eat nor drink ! If I was only sitting opposite him now, watching him peel an apricot ! ”

And she sprang up and put her hands before her eyes as she hastily paced the room, half laughing, half crying.

“ At best, I cannot go to him until after the war,” she sighed. “ Good heavens ! to think

that I shall have to sit here in fear and longing!"

She was very charming in her young love dream and her anxiety for her husband.

But she exercised no witchery over me. I thought of Fritz Roden's pale face, of his anxious eyes, and of his life, blighted by my sister, who had so cruelly deceived him.

"You will remain here with me?" she questioned. "And I wish you, as a favor to me, to write to our guardian in my name; you must explain why there was so much haste. Especially on account of grandmother. The good man will be filled with consternation. Ah, Helena, our grandmother! Believe me, I grieve deeply about her."

I must have made an impatient movement with my hand, for she stopped abruptly.

"I will write your letter for you willingly, Lotta," I said, "but I cannot remain here. I have given Fritz Roden a promise to remain with his mother while he is away."

Lotta was speechless at first, but after a moment answered impatiently:

"Oh, that does not matter!"

"Oh, yes, it does, Charlotte!"

"But I cannot remain here alone; Otto would not hear of it."

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“Your husband will have to look out for a suitable companion for you, and until you get one there is Anita,” I answered.

“Oh, I cannot endure her,” she continued, “she is so insolent and familiar. What do the Rodens say?”

“Nothing at all. But my sense of justice compels me to try and make up to them in some way for the sorrow that has come upon them through you. Besides that—I love the old lady as——”

“As a mother,” interrupted Lotta ironically.

“Yes!” I answered with a full heart.

“Otto will not think it kind of you,” she began after a pause. “He said last evening: ‘I shall, of course, set aside a yearly income for your sister, as——’”

I interrupted: “He is very good, I am sure, but I must decline.”

“What have you against him?” she said sulkily.

“That he was a coward, and acted in a heartless and dishonorable manner when he strove to win secretly the beloved bride of an honest man, that’s what I have against him,” I would have cried out sharply. But I was silent. What was the use of repeating what she must know herself?—and she certainly had been easily won.

A long pause ensued. Anita came in noiselessly and placed fruit, wine, and cake upon the table, and a silver dish filled with cracked ice, and then turned to my sister and asked if the countess had any further orders. Lotta shook her head impatiently, and Anita departed as quietly as she had entered.

They had both accepted their altered positions very quickly. Lotta had evidently entirely forgotten their morning chats ; she was the mistress—Anita the maid.

I sat perfectly silent, and Lotta turned her back partially to me, so that I only saw her profile. I had a sudden feeling of sorrow as I looked at the beautiful creature. God alone knew what was in store for her, what her life would be by the side of a man who had married her so rashly. Should I darken any happy hour she might have with dismal prophecies? I rose hastily.

“Pray to God, Charlotte, and forgive me for being so gloomy ; to-morrow or the day after, when I have become calmer, we will have a long talk. To-day is too soon to talk of plans, and may you be very happy in your new joy.”

She turned toward me with glowing eyes, and a bright flush spread over her whole face.

“I am that already, Helena, and will remain

so, if God in his goodness will only send Otto home to me well and strong."

She took my arm and walked with me to the door.

"Come to-morrow again," she begged; "I must show you the bridal gifts Otto gave me, and the diadem the duchess sent through her gentleman-in-waiting. Yes, and then we will talk of our residence together here."

"No, Lotta, that can never be; we need not speak of it again."

And without waiting for an answer I pressed her hand, and went as I had come, with a heavy heart. And she remained alone in her golden cage with her sweet memories and her great good fortune, and no one whispered in her ear: "You have made a man, a true, good man, miserable for life."





## CHAPTER IX.

“ WE will work, Helena ; that is the only antidote for sorrow,” said Frau Roden, a day or two later. And we did work. We did many things that were not necessary, but we did not allow ourselves many idle moments. The old lady had always some fresh employment on hand ; and she was in the right ; work was our greatest comfort.

It was quiet, very quiet now, in the little sequestered town, and in the great house, too ; then after a time came the first news of victory flying over the German land. From tower to tower sounded the joy bells. Victory ! Victory ! A word that intoxicates like wine. Even in our loneliness it brought new life ; the people gathered in the streets to hear the despatches read, and the children played truant from school in order to learn the latest news ; old enemies shook one another by the hand ; people who had never spoken to each other stopped and chatted in friendly fashion, and from the town hall came the sounds of music and laughter.



“Praise be to God!” And in the church the organ peal sounded forth and lusty voices chanted the song of jubilee. After that came the papers with full particulars and a heart-sickening list of the dead and wounded. What a world of sorrow and woe lay behind this first victory! And as one took up the paper, one shuddered at the thought that a dear name might stand forth which would bring to the heart despair and life-long anguish.

But almost in the same breath with the news of victory came the astounding intelligence to the villagers that Prince Otto had married the beautiful Charlotte von Werthern, and that created no small sensation. The good people still looked upon Lotta as the *fiancée* of Fritz Roden, for no whisper of the broken engagement had crossed the threshold of our homes. And now to hear of this sudden and romantic marriage was indeed a nine days' wonder. Like the circles that widen round a stone just thrown in the water, so went the news from lip to lip, from ear to ear, in whispers low and doubtful—for, who knows, perhaps it was not true. But when one day the princely landau rolled through the streets, and the beautiful young wife, in her elegant attire and with the same proud, cold face, was seen leaning back in it, the people threw open their

windows to catch a glimpse of her, and finally went back to their duties convinced that it was all over with Fritz Roden, and that the gay young prince had indeed taken a wife home to the castle.

Frau Roden's sitting-room was by no means empty at this time ; but all curious questions remained behind the astonished lips, when they perceived that the old lady's relations with me were of such a friendly nature, and that I was established as an inmate of the house.

They went away wiser than they came, however, for she told them all about Fritz ; that he was marching toward France in the best of spirits and wrote her daily.

Our rooms were locked and the furniture had not been touched ; I only brought a few things to the room Frau Roden had given me—the very one which Lotta and I had occupied on our first night. I brought my piano to it and my sewing-table, and the little basket for Schnips stood by the stove.

Our small, four-footed friend had much finer quarters over with Lotta, but sometimes he came in to see me, as much as to say he could not quite neglect his old nurse ; and then I petted him and set a pan of milk before him, of which he never refused to partake.

Lotta lived alone at the castle, and answered the letters and despatches that came to her daily from her husband.

He was with the second Bavarian corps ; his brother, the heir presumptive, was with the Saxons, and Fritz Roden marched with his old regiment, the Prussian Fusilier Guards.

Slowly, slowly passed the time ; so fearful, so hard for us who remained at home. We did all our hands could find to do, in order to alleviate the suffering on the battle-field—but how little that was after all. We could only wait with anxious hearts and bated breath through weary summer days. A hundred times the old lady would say :

“ God guard my son to-day ! ”

How quickly she would hasten across the room and out to the vestibule to meet the old postman, when she caught a glimpse of him coming across the court.

“ Wait, wait ! ” she would cry to the old man, as she hastily tore open the letter, and read what the mother’s eye was longing to see—that her son was strong and well ; then she never failed to reach for her leather pocket and hand the smiling man a hard thaler. And as he departed she would call all the household, great and small, together, and read to them what their master

had written. In no letter did he forget to send greeting to Fräulein von Werthern.

One sultry August evening, I think it was the 18th, we sat listlessly together on a seat under the leafy chestnuts in the court. Frau Roden had been reading, but now was watching the children of one of the servants, who were playing near. Poor Johann, their father, was lame, and, greatly to his sorrow, had to stay at home. The housekeeper and some of the maids were seated not far distant, also watching the children.

They played at war, of course, and we were amused, especially Frau Roden, at the martial air they assumed as they chanted :

“ One, two, three,  
The French must go !  
They will advance,  
They must retreat.  
One, two, three,  
The French must go !”

“ That’s an old song,” she said ; “ I used to near my mother hum it.”

Just then a lackey came in through the open gateway, and told me that the countess wished to see me at once.

I took off my little apron and followed him.

“ You must help me,” said Lotta, as she met me, evidently much pleased over something.

“Only think, the duchess has decided to see me—at last. Ah, Helena, it has been a great humiliation to me that they have taken no notice of me—have not cared to see me. And now—the duchess is going—incognita—to Grunen, and I am to go there to meet her—accidentally; and you must accompany me. See for yourself what she writes—it is such a kind, tender letter.

“She will see you, too—the sister-in-law to her dear son. Oh, she must be charming! Helena, do tell me what I shall wear.”

And she pulled me into her sleeping-chamber, and called Anita to bring her half a dozen costumes, that we might select one. She trembled and laughed, and was like a happy child.

“I am rejoiced, Lotta,” I said, “that everything goes so well with you. Have you good news from your husband, too?”

“Oh, excellent! He is quartered in the beautiful castle of St. Nicholas, and is amusing himself. He has just sent me from Nancy a great roll of white silks and satins. He says I must always wear white.”

And as she spoke she took from Anita a lovely robe of white mull.

“There, Helena! Will that do?—that is, if the weather is clear and bright to-morrow.

Anita, bring me the hat with the white ostrich plumes. You will come with me, surely, Helena?"

I could not do anything to disturb her great joy; and it was a burden lifted from my heart, too, that they had finally taken notice of her.

"When is the meeting to take place?"

"To-morrow afternoon at two o'clock; we start from here at twelve. Be punctual, Helena."

I promised, and praised her toilet. Then we went again into the yellow room; Lotta sat down hastily at her writing-table.

"You want to write and tell the prince," I said, "and I would only disturb you, so farewell, until to-morrow."

I told Frau Roden that the duchess would see Lotta on the morrow, and how graciously she had written.

"That is well," she answered, as she emptied a basket of beans into a large dish. "She is a fool about her young son, and will do as he wishes, but the duke will never forgive this marriage, if I understand him aright. He is an imperious man, and Prince Otto's conduct, you will find, has not been to his taste at all."

"Why should he not relent?" I cried.

"Oh, child, none of us like such surprises."

I spent the evening in looking over my simple wardrobe ; I wanted Lotta to be satisfied with my appearance. Frau Roden came in my room and sat down on the sofa to study the evening paper.

“Who knows what may have happened to-day ?” she said.

Ah, if we could have looked that evening on the bloodiest battle-field of the whole war !

The next morning was bright and clear, but the sun was oppressively hot.

Frau Roden left the breakfast-table and stationed herself at the window to watch for the postman ; but he only made a motion with his hand, and passed on down the shady lane.

“That is bad, Helena.”

“Perhaps you’ll get one at midday,” I said consolingly.

“Perhaps,” she sighed.

It was about ten o’clock ; I sat at Frau Roden’s writing-table, and was going through her account-book for her. Suddenly the great bell of St. Mary’s sounded, and all the smaller ones joined in a second later.

“News of another victory !” I cried, and rushed to the window ; already the masons engaged on the castle garden wall were hastening away. But the people were so silent, so differ-



ent from usual, that we looked at one another puzzled and terrified.

“Helena, I must see what it is!” cried the old lady, and a moment later she was hastening on, under the chestnuts, as rapidly as a young girl.

I knew not why it was that I was so alarmed; my knees were trembling, and it was with difficulty that I stood at the door awaiting Frau Roden’s return.

She brought sad tidings.

“A great battle has been won at Gravelotte, but our heir apparent has fallen!”

The heir apparent! It was more than sorrow which seized me now—it was the foreboding of coming disaster.

And all the while Lotta was standing before her mirror, in her lovely white gown, laughing, singing, as happy as could be, and knowing nothing of the fate that should strike her joy in its foundations. She had heard nothing when I entered her room breathless. She was putting on the new hat, and its long white plumes fell gracefully over her dark hair.

“Good-morning, Lotta,” I said, with as much composure as I could command.

But before she could answer me Anita stood before us pale and trembling, a picture of horror.

Lotta looked at us and cried out :

“Great God! is he dead, Helena? Have mercy on me!”

I shall never forget the tones of her voice; they were so clear and sharply accentuated.

“No, Lotta; not your husband—but his elder brother, who fell at St. Privat.”

“The heir is dead—the heir?” she stammered, “the heir? O God, I thank thee it is not my husband!” and she burst into tears.

Anita stood speechless, but uttered no word; but we heard a low rustling outside, and some one handed her a paper, saying :

“A despatch for my lady the countess.”

I perceived it was the old groom who always attended Lotta, and he looked sorrowfully now at the young wife weeping so bitterly.

She took the paper and read :

“Grunen impossible.

“VON OERZEN.”

That was the short but terribly significant message.

“Impossible!” I heard Anita repeat.

I heard the bells tolling slowly and the voices and tread of many men. When I went to the window, I found a crowd of people with uncovered heads looking up at the castle as if they

would hear some further confirmation of the sad and sudden tidings.

And that moment as if for answer the flag which had flaunted its colors so gayly in the morning breeze sank to half mast. They looked up at the tower and then at her windows, and stood in silent groups, which were enlarging at every moment.

And here within sat Lotta, thanking God devoutly that he had protected her beloved.

"Will there be a memorial service?" she asked, and sent Anita out to make inquiries. She returned shortly, and with unsteady voice reported that the people were already gathering in the church.

"Come, Helena," said Lotta.

We pushed our way through the crowds, and soon found ourselves within the crowded sanctuary. When the verger perceived us, he tried to open the ducal pew, but in his excitement he could not find the key. While we stood waiting the organ began.

"Let us go into the Roden pew," I whispered; "we cannot remain in this crowd."

She followed me, still dressed in the light summer robe which she had put on for her interview with the duchess. Her countenance was pale, and wore a strange expression of mingled

fear, pain, and happiness. As we slipped into the seat I saw Frau Roden in the shadow of a pillar; she was still attired in her plain house dress and simple cap, and a little shawl thrown over her shoulders; her hands were folded upon her hymn-book. I had not thought of the possibility of this meeting. Lotta took a seat in the corner. The old lady never looked at her, but motioned me to a seat by her side.

“Helena,” she whispered in breathless terror, “he was in that battle yesterday; his regiment was there, and the Prussian king says himself in the despatch: ‘I dare not ask what our loss has been!’ Oh, if God has done that to me!” She held my hand in her trembling palm, but could not join in the hymn which hundreds of voices took up as the organ pealed it forth: “God doeth all things well.”

A gray and ghostly mist rose before my eyes; all light and color disappeared; the organ’s tone and the singing fused into that one cry, “Helena, he was in that battle.” Merciful God, thou must have protected him.

The organ ceased, and I heard the voice of the preacher saying: “The beauty of Israel is slain upon the high places. How are the mighty fallen.

“Lord, thou hast required hard things of us

The hope of our land hast thou taken from us, and our noblest ones from out our midst. In the castle of our sovereign gray-haired parents are weeping, and our beloved princess mourns for her husband, to whom but a year ago she gave her hand, and who yesterday met a hero's death at the head of his column. And yet, our noble duke has said, and shall we not repeat it with him: 'Peace be to him and to all those who lie upon that bloody field, for they have not fallen in vain, since they died for the Fatherland.'

"We who are assembled here do not yet know which one of us has a son, a brother, or a husband lying on that distant field, for the battle was hot, and rich and full was the harvest of death. But whomsoever the bolt may strike let him lift up his eyes to our princely house whose members bow their knees in humility and resignation, and let him say with them, 'Lord, thy will be done.'"

Lord, thy will be done! Ah, how few there were who were able to repeat those words in humility and devotion. The dear old mother at my side sat as if she had been turned to stone. She said to me later, "I went to the church, yet I could not pray." It was even so with me. As we came out of the church we found the sky

over-clouded and heard the rumble of distant thunder. I led Frau Roden by the arm.

Lotta, followed by Anita, hurried on ahead. I looked after her as she forced her way through the crowd which reverentially made way for her on every side. Some took off their hats to her; she, however, made no response to their greeting, but kept right on, looking neither to the right nor to the left. Suddenly I heard a voice from the crowd: "If the princess has a son there will be no change; otherwise we'll have Otto." There was a murmur at my side: "God have mercy. Let us pray that it may be a boy!" I looked at Frau Roden inquiringly.

"The poor princess," she said.

"And if it should be a girl?" I asked, and my heart stood still.

"Then Prince Otto will be heir to the throne."

"Good heavens!—and Lotta?" I felt an impulse to rush after her with a warning: "Prepare yourself to take leave of your happiness."

But all was not lost yet. The royal child was not yet born; she might still hope, and so might we.

We found no ill news awaiting us when we reached home, and we felt we had yet reason to hope.

The heavy thunder-storm was upon us now,

and it was almost dark in the sitting-room. Frau Roden sat down quietly in her easy-chair, and stared without speaking at the swaying branches of the old chestnut. At last she said with a sigh :

“ If I only had some sign that he was alive ! ”

But none came.

I was very anxious about my old friend, and sat on a stool at her feet, trying to say what I could to comfort her. All was silent in the house, and in the streets only the sound of the rain still falling heavily.

The night came at last ; we sent away the evening meal untasted. How could we eat when our hearts seemed almost breaking ?

We retired to our rooms and lived through that miserable night as best we could. I repeated over and over again the question : “ Is he alive ? ” and I always gave myself the same answer : “ He is dead, he is dead ; he has sought death because he could not live without Lotta ! ”

The thought pursued me with terrible force, and at last became in my heart a certainty.

The next morning the extra with full account of the battle appeared, but I shrank from looking at the list of the slain. The Guards had suffered the most.

“ Lord, give me strength, ” said the pale mother,



as her trembling hands refused to hold the paper.

Toward evening a telegraph boy came to the house with a despatch. It was a fearful moment when the old lady took it.

“Bring me a chair, Helena—so—and a light.”

Then she wiped the beads of perspiration from her brow and opened the paper—slowly—slowly.

“Helena!” she said to me after a moment.

I could only kneel by her and bury my head in her lap. I heard the rustle of the paper and her heavy sigh as she read :

“Am wounded in the arm. Do not be anxious, send particulars soon. Hans von Werthern fell at my side.”

I raised my head and we gazed at one another.

“Hans!” I whispered. That was indeed sad news for me to hear. My brother, my only brother! and as I thought there came a feeling of sweet peace over me; I could cry now knowing he died with honor. My first thought was for the placid face that was hidden away in the graveyard yonder. “Ah, grandmother, what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh! He came back from America in order to die for the Fatherland! He has more than retrieved his past!”

Frau Roden rose suddenly.

“ My boy must come home ! ”

Then she put her arm around me. “ Helena, I feel for you, my dear. You must go immediately to the countess, and I will hunt up Müller. He must start at once to bring my boy home, if he—” she struggled to keep back the tears—“ be alive to come back.”

She accompanied me to the door, and then went off to hunt for the overseer, while I hastened to Lotta. She was seated at the table, with a picture of the prince before her.

“ Lotta,” I said, not knowing how I was to break to her the news of her brother’s death. She was looking at her husband’s picture with tender eyes, and motioned me to a seat beside her. “ Have you had letters ? ” I asked.

“ No,” she answered, “ or rather yes,” she continued, as if speaking of a matter of secondary importance—“ a letter from Hans ; he is back in Germany again ; has come, in fact, to take part in the campaign. Would that he had remained in America ! It is so painful ; he should have saved me from disagreeable possibilities. I do hope he won’t run across Otto, for he would be sure to ask his intercession in arranging his affairs.”

My eyes were fastened on the floor, but the tears ran down my cheeks. Lotta had not hesi-

tated to implore Fritz Roden's aid for her brother, but now her pride made any such appeal to her husband very painful. Evidently the thought that the prince might encounter Hans disturbed her deeply. Her sisterly love seemed to have diminished since her residence in these beautiful rooms.

"Why do you weep?" she asked impatiently.

Then I laid the despatch down before her and went in the next room. It was kinder to her to let her learn the news by herself, after the sharp comment she had just uttered.

After a time she followed me, and threw her arms around my neck. And we sat hand in hand in the dark room, and wept together over our lost Hans. I knew she would have given much in that hour if she could have recalled the last words she had spoken about him. We remained absolutely silent: what was there to be said?

When I went home, late in the evening, I found the house in a bustle; Frau Roden had just finished packing a trunk, and was now filling a hamper with wines, liquors, and other possible necessities for an invalid.

"I have sent him some changes of linen," she said to me, putting her hand on the little trunk, "and Müller starts at eleven o'clock."

He came in at half-past ten, with his hat on

and an overcoat over his arm, while he carried a thick walking-stick. He was a quiet, reserved man of about fifty years; he sat down by the table as composedly as if he had dropped in for a consultation regarding his daily duties, and listened respectfully to his mistress's directions regarding the journey.

"Müller," she said, "I don't think you'll have much difficulty. German is spoken everywhere now, and when you come to the place all you'll have to do is to ask where the hospital is, and if there is none, then you must search untiringly for your young master. You will surely recognize him, no matter how miserable he may look."

"Yes, Frau Roden," he responded solemnly, "I should know him under any circumstances."

"And send me news every day. I have put plenty of postal-cards in the trunk pocket, and pens and ink too; and do not be saving of the money; I know how economical you are. Spend when you need it."

"Yes, Frau Roden."

"Müller, if you find him doing well!"

"I think I shall."

"Then all may be well yet—God is good!"

"Of course, mistress."

"Müller, if he is very ill, telegraph me at once. I shall be ready to start. I must see him once

more, even if he does not recognize me. And, Müller, if the worst has happened—if they have already buried him—then at least find the spot where my last son lies.”

She cried softly, and Müller turned away, but his big gray eyes were wet, I could see.

“No, no, Frau Roden,” he said, after a pause, “nothing so bad as that, and it does not help matters to weep; you must hold up your head. This is war, and you do not weep alone, Frau Roden.”

“Yes, Müller, you are right; crying will not mend matters, and I am no bad patriot. I would willingly do much for the Fatherland, and am very proud of the victory we have just won. But when I think that my boy may never call ‘mother’ again, that I may never hear his familiar footstep, never see him cross the threshold of this room—in that moment I forget country and honor, and only remember that I am a poor old woman, from whom has been taken her last support, and that no sunbeam can ever cross my pathway again if my son shall have gone from me forever. Ah, Müller, you ask all the mothers that have been childless since yesterday, whether one of them finds heart to thank God because she is the mother of a hero, when her boy is lying stiff and cold upon

the battle-field. No, no ; they are on their knees in agony with no other feeling than that of pain ! I speak of wives as well as mothers, Muller ; but we all love our Fatherland, too."

"To be sure," Müller answered thoughtfully. "I know that from my own dear sister, who has grieved so sorely because she has never heard from her youngest son since. Yes, the mother hangs some new hope each day upon her children's blonde heads.

"But no one escapes, Frau Roden, not even the king, nor Bismarck, nor Moltke ; they all have broken hearts as well as the mothers—the whole land mourns. But, Frau Roden, do not be discouraged ; the young master lives, and so long as we have life we have hope. Farewell ; the carriage is waiting."

"Adieu, Müller ! Take care of my Fritz ; I will never forget your fidelity as long as I live."

"Oh, Frau Roden, that is only my duty," said the man. "Farewell, Fräulein von Werthern."

"Adieu, Herr Müller," I said ; "give a kindly greeting to your master from me."

The old lady followed him to the door, and I stood at the window watching the carriage lamps until they disappeared under the gateway. Would he find him ? I wondered. Would he find him—and how ? Wounded to the death,

or dying of fever, or perhaps, like our poor Hans, no more counted among the living ?

Frau Roden did not come back, and, after a time, I sought her through the house and found her in her son's room ; the candle stood upon his writing-table, and she was sitting on the sofa holding an old straw hat in her hand.

"It had fallen from his clothes-press," she explained ; and I acted as if I did not know that the dear old soul had come here to look for something belonging to her Fritz which she might press to her lips.

And then she asked the question I had just put to myself : "Would Müller find him, and would he bring him home ?" I was silent, and she moaned sadly.

"What will become of us if he does not come back, Helena ?"

"Of us ?" I asked. The "us" struck to my very heart. The hat rolled to my feet, and the old lady rose and threw her arms around me and kissed me warmly. "Ah, dear child, you do not know how much I love you !" Then she looked into my tired face, and led me across the hall to my own room. "Go to sleep," she said ; "it has been a hard day ; God will be merciful." And I was left alone in my room, my heart beating strangely in my breast.



What would become of us—of me? Ah, I could not be more miserable if he were dead, not more miserable than now, for he would never forget Lotta, never! And if he came home, where would I go? Where indeed? The world was large, and helping hands were needed everywhere.

“I will become a nurse in a hospital,” I determined, as I stared into the darkness with my sleepless eyes.





## CHAPTER X.

DAY followed day, slowly and tediously. In the bright sunny room adjoining Frau Roden's own sleeping-chamber a bed had been placed, and was all in readiness with its snow-white linen for the young master. Heavy shutters hung at the windows so that the sun could be excluded on oppressive days, a large invalid's chair was placed at one of them, and everything was in readiness for the reception of the invalid ; but he for whose comfort all had been prepared did not come.

Very meagre was the news which we received from Müller, for he got on slowly. The railways had been torn up, and conveyances of any kind it was hard to obtain, and he had been able, so far, to ascertain nothing definite in regard to where the wounded had been taken. They had evidently been distributed over different parts of the country. Each day the papers recounted additional horrors of that fatal battle-field : was it any wonder that our courage sank deeper and deeper ?

At last we saw his name in the list of the severely wounded. " Oh God ! and I am not with

him," moaned his mother; "my only son, all I have in this world—and so far from him." And then she would ask again whether she was not strong enough to go in search of him, and she would always give herself the same despondent answer:

"But I could not go beyond the frontier."

Then after two weeks came a card from Pont à Mousson:

"I have found him, he is already better; in two weeks the physician says he thinks we will be able to start for home, travelling slowly. He only recovered consciousness yesterday and is very weak; he was very glad to see me, and sends a hearty greeting to his mother. He is sleeping now, and Frau Roden can nurse the happy thought that he has had enough of this campaign, which, by the way, I think will soon end. I will write you regularly hereafter.

"MÜLLER."

I was with Lotta when the card came, but in her joy Frau Roden sent it over to me at once.

Lotta took no notice of the paper the servant had brought me. She worked quietly on the princely arms which she was embroidering in gold and red on a white ground. She was making a portfolio cover for her husband to send him on his birthday. With a happy smile she stopped every now and then to consider her work

and to look at it in a small mirror that lay on the table in front of her.

We were sitting in the castle garden ; it was one of those perfect days which seem only possible in September, and the gentle breeze stirred the branches over our heads and bore to us the delicate perfumes of the autumn flowers.

Lotta had letters and despatches lying around her, and in an open case on the table before her lay a magnificent jewel from the court jeweller which had been sent her by the order of his highness, and which blazed and glistened in the sunshine. She was in great good humor to-day, for she had just received a long letter from one of her former friends in Berlin, congratulating her upon her brilliant alliance, and saying that notwithstanding the war excitement, the chief topic of conversation in society circles at the capital was the marriage of the lovely Lotta von Werthern with Prince Otto.

Her husband had just written her that as soon as the war was over—and it looked now as if peace would soon be proclaimed—they would take their wedding journey, and he asked her in which city she would prefer to reside for the coming winter, Rome or Naples. She was so absorbed in her pleasant dreams and the embroidery she was working that she did not

notice the card, upon which Frau Roden had added :

“ Do not hurry back, Helena, for I am going to the superintendent and then to Frau Oberförster to tell them that he yet lives.”

We had never spoken of Fritz Roden. I felt my hand tremble violently as I gave Lotta a cup of coffee for which she had begged, and a few brown drops fell upon the embroidery.

She looked up angrily.

“ Ah, Helena, be careful. You will spoil all my work.”

I was frightened and begged her pardon. But she was not mollified.

“ I would like to know, Helena, what has come over you ?”

“ It was good news, Lotta.”

“ From whom have you had good news ?”

“ Not I ; it was Frau Roden received it ; Fritz is better. You probably do not know that he was severely wounded.”

She lifted her head and looked at me ; there was no sympathy in the glance of astonishment. I had spoken rather sharply. As she said nothing I began :

“ As I am talking about this, Lotta, I may as well add, that I am going back to Berlin when Fritz Roden returns.”

“Why under the sun would you do that?” And the piercing glance she gave me seemed to look into my very soul. I felt the hot blood rush into my cheeks. I made no answer, but began knitting again on the socks which were to be sent in Frau Roden’s next box to camp.

“For my sake do not leave your present asylum,” she began. “How can my having broken my engagement affect you? He is far too good-natured, and was too deeply in love with me to blame my sister for what I did; and as you know all the circumstances, and he made it very plain that he was desperately in love with me, you have nothing to risk in any way by remaining. Or perhaps you have other reasons?”

“No,” I answered coolly.

“At one time I thought you were in love with Fritz Roden,” she continued; “but when I saw how collected you were, and how quietly you sat at your work-table when my lover came in, I said to myself: ‘No; when a woman truly loves she would rather spring from the bridge into the water beneath, than watch, with apparent indifference, another receive the caresses for which she longs.’ Is that not so, Helena?”

I could not answer; she knew nothing of the agony and despair I had endured that night on the steps, nor how hard it had been for me to sit

quietly when I heard his footsteps at the door; I had often been fearful she would hear my heart beat.

Lotta sat quietly for a few moments winding her silks carelessly.

At last she said: "And that is why I think you can remain quietly where you are, without your enviable equanimity being disturbed in the slightest."

"That is what you call love?" I asked, taking no notice of her last words.

"Yes, that is love," she replied vehemently. "Suppose, for example, that you loved Fritz Roden. Do you think that was love you felt when you came to me with his proposal? And during the whole time of my engagement, which, by the way, was the most horrible chapter of my whole life, you kept urging me to treat him with what you considered a proper regard, and begged me on your knees not to retract my promise, because it would make him unhappy. Helena, I tell you that no woman who loves has any such magnanimity, not even the noblest soul, and such, on the whole, I consider you to be. No human being has such control over himself."

"I believe in a better love," I said, half aloud.

"Then it is no love at all," she continued irrefully. "Do not always revolve around one idea,



Helena ; call it friendship, good-will, benevolence—what you will—but do not call it love ! Love is never better nor never worse ; it is always and ever the same ; it tolerates nothing foreign. You certainly won't try to make me believe that you——”

“ Shall I read the papers aloud ? ” I interrupted shortly.

“ No, I thank you. I am tired to death of this unending war news,” she answered peevishly ; “ just as I am tired of seeing you forever knitting at those socks.”

This was the old capricious Lotta von Werthern. Uncertain in temper, and always wrathful when her opinion was not accepted. How she could hurt me with her tongue. I continued knitting for a few moments, and then rolled up my work, and rose preparatory to going home.

As I did so, I saw Anita coming down the path toward us. She was dressed entirely in black, and looked smaller than ever. I thought, as I watched her, how lovely she must have been when a girl, and how attractive she was still.

Anita could not keep her eyes from mirroring what was in her mind, and I saw, as she came up to us, that something had occurred which disturbed her greatly.

“Countess,” she said, in a humble, quiet voice, “I bring you bad news; early this morning, at R., a dead prince was born.”

She gave me a glance, as she spoke, which I did not then comprehend.

But Lotta only said :

“Oh !—dead ? How sad ! ”

She had no thought that in this little princely coffin would be buried, not only the last consolation of the stricken and widowed mother, but her own hopes of happiness as well.

Anita was silent, but looked at me with uneasy, frightened eyes. Lotta sat plying her needle with its golden thread, and thought only of a wreath for the coffin.

“Go at once to the gardener, Anita, and tell him to make a wreath of white violets; there are so many violets now, and they are spring flowers, too. Poor princess! And how is she, Anita? How did you hear of it?”

“The whole town is talking of it, my lady.”

“Well, I shall, of course, be informed of it. Go and tell the gardener about the wreath.” Anita went at once.

I felt almost suffocated as I looked at the young wife sitting so quietly opposite me. A storm was gathering around her which might at any moment burst over her beautiful head and

destroy her forever. She sat leaning back in her chair, and had thrown her embroidery aside. I knew not what were her thoughts, but the color came and went in her face.

Finally she rose and said: "I want to write to Otto; only a few words. Will you come in with me?"

"I will follow you shortly, Lotta."

I followed her with my eye until she disappeared through the glass door in the castle. What would become of this passionate creature when they should say to her: "Go, you are not of high enough birth to be the wife of the heir to the throne?"

I could not endure the thought of it, and sprang up and began to wander through the grounds, among the beds of brilliant flowers, past the murmuring fountains, catching glimpses now and then of the white marble statues which glistened in the sunlight or stood half hidden in the shadow of the grove.

But was all then lost? If only the prince loved her better than crown or throne! Is not a marriage sacred? How could man dare to interfere when they had given themselves to one another to all eternity? And then there came, as if in answer to my question, a whisper from Anita, who stood by my side.

“Oh, this is very bad for the countess, Fräulein von Werthern.”

I turned now and went into the castle, and found Lotta in her own room at the beautiful writing-table, with its feet of golden lion's claws, and its back a golden sphinx with unearthly eyes resting upon a marble base with the inscription in French: “What the future has hidden in its dark bosom is a riddle, unfathomable for the moment, but Time reveals all things.” Before her lay a letter already sealed and directed.

“Read the address,” she said, handing it to me. “I am sadly confused to-day. Is it all right?”

“Yes,” I answered, after scanning it carefully. She thanked me, and stepped to the bell.

After the servant had taken the letter away, she turned to me: “Helena, I think there is a ‘History of Roman Art’ among our books; won't you find it and send it across to me? I want to study it.”

“Willingly, Lotta; and I will come back and remain with you, if you desire it.”

“No, no; I will read.” And she took from a drawer a package of letters and untied them. They were her husband's. Had she any misgivings that her trust and confidence in him might prove misplaced?

As I went from the castle I met Frau Roden,

with a happy smile on her face that had been lacking there for many a day. "God is good," she said, as she pressed my hand.

"Have you heard," I asked, "the prince was born dead?"

She nodded her head and looked at me earnestly, but said nothing.

The following morning all Germany was one great jubilee. The bells pealed forth merrily, and the people shouted themselves hoarse, as the news fairly flew: "Napoleon is taken prisoner! He has surrendered his sword to the King of Prussia!"

The air was filled with music, and the people shouted their war songs with untiring enthusiasm.

Just at twilight as I sat at my window an elegant carriage drove up to the castle, and a man alighted and went hurriedly within the portals. I could not see clearly, for the chestnut branches were in my way. "Could it possibly be Prince Otto?" I asked myself.

I had just finished writing a letter to my guardian, begging him to secure for me a place as nurse in a Berlin hospital.

Frau Roden had no thought of what I contemplated; that I knew, but I could not do otherwise. It was no despairing jump from the

bridge, as Lotta had said, but I did not feel I was strong enough to begin my old heart struggles anew.

There was no sound in the whole house. All the maids and lads were out—building the bonfires and otherwise assisting in the preparations for the illumination.

The great, good news of victory had obliterated from all minds for the time being the little dead prince.

It was a high, a holy inspiration, and the enthusiasm reached the lowliest hut, and entered into hearts which sorrow and distress had made almost callous. The people stood upon their doorsteps and talked of it all over and over again, and even the smallest children playing at their feet told how Napoleon had been captured, and his army forced to lay down their arms.

And the mother nodded, and thought of the broken hearts the terrible war had made.

“Napoleon is a prisoner! Great God, thou art just!”

Then I heard the voice of the old lady singing in her feeble tremble, “Now praise ye the Lord!”

I hurried downstairs to her and sat down on a stool at her feet, and soon we were singing together:

“ With one consent let all the earth  
To God their cheerful voices raise ! ”

As I sang I looked up at the picture hanging over the piano, and the tears filled my eyes as I gazed on the handsome boyish face. Ah, the battle-field of St. Privat had left scars that only time could heal; I could sing no more that night!

“ Ah, Helena, there is joy and peace in many households to-night,” said the old lady, pressing my hand gently. “ And now come with me to the cellar; to night my people shall have a glass of wine: there is a small cask of red Elsässer which they shall drink; Jurgen shall bring it up. And then we must light the lamps. I see lights already in the shop at the corner.”

But the old lady had to go alone to the cellar after all, for Lotta sent me an imperative message to come across to her immediately.

As I hastened to her in the yellow salon, I realized that the storm had already gathered, and hung over the head of the deathly-pale wife, who met me with such singular composure as I entered.

To think that it had come so quickly!

“ The Lord Chamberlain von Oerzen,” said Lotta, presenting me; and from a sofa near the round table in the middle of the room rose a little thin man, about fifty-five years of age, I



should judge. His dress was entirely black ; he wore a mourning badge on his right arm, and held his hat in his hand while he made me a ceremonious bow. He gave a slight cough, looked at me curiously through his pale blue eyes, and then took another seat nearer us. Lotta sank back again in her low chair, and I took a seat near her.

No one spoke for a moment, and the stillness was oppressive ; the sounds of music and the joyful shouts came in through the window.

“Shouts of victory,” said the lord chamberlain, at last, as he turned to me. “What a glittering exterior ! And yet how sad to the individual is this war, how many fair young lives, how many beautiful hopes are destroyed ! There comes to the one who is forced to make great sacrifices only the consolation : It is for the good of all.”

He looked across at Lotta, who sat with white face and a smile of derision on her trembling lips. She gave him no answer.

“The gracious countess will understand it fully,” he said, smiling and bowing, while he turned his eyes searchingly upon her immobile countenance.

“No,” responded Lotta, “I do not understand it, and will not understand it, Herr von Oerzen.

Have the goodness to say to the duke that you unfortunately had to do with a woman who was so dull of apprehension that she was unable to comprehend 'the good of all.' But that she is a woman, a woman who loves her husband unspeakably, and who therefore has no place in her heart for these other interests. Tell the duke that this woman knows nothing of politics, but that she does know how to be true and how to keep her word."

Lotta controlled her voice with difficulty as she spoke. She rose with her last words, and bowed haughtily to the astounded ambassador, and in another moment the yellow silk curtains closed behind her vanishing form. Now I knew all; it had come to this.

I was about to follow her, but the lord chamberlain detained me by a motion of his hand and a despairing glance. "Fräulein von Werthern," he said earnestly, "it is a terribly painful and exceedingly delicate matter upon which I have sought an audience with the countess. I beg you to assist me, to stand by me. It is an affair of the coldest reason, a question of politics, and I know that it must fall into the spring-time of love like a destructive frost. But the necessity is so inexorable, the compulsion so unavoidable, that—that——"

He paused and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“I know what you mean, Herr von Oerzen; everybody anticipated what would come after the death of the heir apparent and the birth of the dead prince, everybody except my sister; my poor, dear Lotta.”

“Fräulein von Werthern, the tradition, the custom, is as relentless as fate; but it must be so.”

“I understand you perfectly,” I replied, and my voice trembled. “You said the same thing a moment ago plainly enough: ‘The individual must subordinate himself to the whole.’ It sounds very wonderful and may be very noble, but——”

“But you heard the countess’s answer,” he interrupted hastily. “I dare not take such an answer to the duke. I must at least have the appearance of compliance.”

“You do not know my sister.”

“My God, Fräulein, the countess is a lady of such fine feeling, such delicate perceptions, it is impossible she should not perceive that Prince Otto really can no longer follow his inclinations, that he has earnest duties to perform.”

“She loves her husband,” I stammered, and the tears came into my eyes.

“I beseech you, Fräulein, to obtain for me

another quarter of an hour's audience with the countess."

"I will try it," I answered, and went with beating heart into the next apartment; she was not there!

But in her bed-chamber I heard the sound of sobbing, and directed my steps thither. The rich hanging lamp cast a rose glow through the cosey room, and the princely crown, by which the heavy folds of the blue silk hangings of the great bed were fastened to the ceiling, sparkled faintly in the dim light. My step was not audible on the thick, soft carpet, and I kneeled down by Lotta, who sat motionless in a large arm-chair. Her back was turned to the light, her hands were firmly clasped together, and her eyes were fixed upon a life-size portrait of the prince which hung on the wall before her. She did not perceive my presence until I touched her lightly.

"Lotta, my dear, good Lotta," I said tenderly.

"What do you want?" she said as she aroused herself.

"I thought you were crying, Lotta."

"I?—no;—why? Because the duke has sent the scarecrow to intimidate me? No! I am disturbed, but Otto will know how to avenge me. Do you know why that man came, Helena?" she continued, leaning forward. "I shall write

at once to Otto that if he is in doubt as to whether he will resign his claims as heir apparent, I will not stand in the way of his fortune, and will give him at once his freedom—freedom to marry a princess, for, of course, that is what they require. Yes, Helena, that is what I shall write him—with this hand, which has each day written to assure him that I would love him to all eternity. I, who have scarcely possessed him, will show him the way to turn aside if he desires. They have offered me what they consider adequate compensation, and the unbounded thanks of the ducal household as an additional gift. My God !”

She ceased speaking, and the small hand upon which the new wedding ring sparkled, clutched at her hair spasmodically.

“Never,” she repeated, “never. I will not be a puppet in their hands.”

“Lotta,” I begged, “Herr von Oerzen wishes to speak to you only for a moment.”

“No !” she cried, and sprang to her feet. “No ! Say to him, that if it be Prince Otto’s wish to push the unbefitting wife aside, well and good ; but I will have no further conversation on the subject—never. And he,” she sank back in her chair and looked up at me wildly, “he loves me. Go and tell that man what I say.”

“The duchess wished to spare her much bitterness,” lisped the chamberlain, rather disconcerted by my message, “both him and her. Only this morning the duchess said to me that it would be, in the long run, so much better for the countess if she, with noble self-forgetfulness, would give back to the prince his freedom, so much easier for her than to have him say, ‘My dear child, so and so, I have loved you ardently, but the circumstances demand’— You understand, Fräulein von Werthern?”

“Pardon me, Herr von Oerzen,” I asked, trembling, “but if the prince does not say that, if he loves my sister so well that he will not renounce her, what then?”

He was embarrassed, greatly embarrassed; he stammered about beauty, intellectual endowments of the countess, relentless fate, fulfilment of duty, princely birth, and what its requirements were.

“It was a foolish question,” I responded bitterly. “Pardon me!” He stared at the tears that were rolling down my cheeks—after all, he was only a human being.

“Fräulein von Werthern,” he began warmly, and took my hand; “you do not know Prince Otto; but were it otherwise, were he the most earnest, the best, the truest, and most honest of

his sex, if he were convinced that they should both be miserable for all time, he there and she here, still it could not be helped. There are duties which a prince dare not shun ; the times of Philippine Welser and of the old Duke of Dessau are gone. Farewell, dear Fräulein, and do me the justice to believe that in all my life I have had no harder duty to perform than the message which I was forced to deliver in this room to-day."

He pressed my hand and bowed and was gone in a moment. I hastened to Lotta's sleeping-room, but found the glass doors behind the curtains closed. I knocked several times, but received no answer.

"Lotta!" I cried, "I only want to speak a word, dear Lotta!" But I heard no sound. Puzzled I turned away, and found Anita waiting to speak to me.

"Herr von Oerzen begs that you will give these papers to the countess, for she may possibly be induced to sign them," she said, and handed me a sealed envelope addressed to my sister.

I took it mechanically and stepped back into the yellow salon ; Anita followed me, evidently with something on her mind. I went to the table, and stood there with sorrowful thoughts in my heart.



“Fräulein von Werthern,” began Anita, in her peculiarly accentuated German, “the duke means well by the countess—he—he—if the countess will believe it——”

I looked at her and she hesitated a moment.

“Oh, Fräulein von Werthern, you have never liked me,” she continued, “you have always passed me by so proudly as if you would say, ‘I perceive that all is not quite right here.’ How does it happen that I am here in this castle—that the people look at me with such meaning glances? It is a long, sad history, which I will not relate to you, only I pray, if it is possible, make the countess accept the proposal that was made to her to-day! She will be spared great grief, for he”—she came close to me—“he is one of those of whom your German proverb says: He would walk over the body of his brother!”

I stared at her. What could she know of the lord chamberlain’s mission?

She took up a silver tray with a glass of seltzer water on it, and as she turned to leave the room she looked back over her shoulder at me, and smiling, added:

“I know it from my own experience; I know how such things are arranged here.”

Her speech had a frivolous sound, but in her dark eyes the tears had gathered and gave a

sharp contradiction to her assumed gayety. For the first time in my life I had a feeling of compassion for this woman, growing gray in this castle. Oh, if Lotta had never set foot in the place ! And her old words sounded suddenly in my ear : “ No, I will not be a puppet.” Ah, Lotta, how impetuous and thoughtless you have been all your life.

The lamp burned brightly in the lovely room, casting its shadows here and there ; the clock ticked softly ; the golden statue of the sphinx rose from its marble base and eyed me silently ; and the inscription stared at me with its devilish device : “ What the future has hidden in its dark bosom is a riddle, unfathomable for the moment, but time reveals all things.”

To me the future was now no riddle. I saw Lotta leaving forever the castle, and I going sadly to join her from the house opposite—and we two, arm in arm, leaving the town and going—where ? I knew not. But we were poor beggars, without happiness or hope.





## CHAPTER XI.

THE following day I received a line from Lotta: "Will you go with me to the concert this evening?" I looked up at Frau Roden, frightened: we had talked of nothing else since yesterday but Lotta, and the great trouble and sorrow that had come to her. There was a strange singer in town, and the object of the concert was to raise money for the wounded, and for the widows and orphans in Rotenberg.

"Go with her, Helena; many seek diversion to hide their grief," said the good creature; "only think in what distress she must really be."

I assented, and soon after I had sent Lotta my answer, I heard her carriage rattling down the street. She had gone driving as usual, with coachman and lackey and all the princely paraphernalia.

In the evening, when I with heavy heart went over to accompany her, I found her waiting, already dressed in the most elegant mourning attire I have ever seen; a black crape gown with a long train, richly garnished with point lace, and a fan to match. As we threaded our way through

the narrow aisle in the crowded little theatre, we were followed by hundreds of curious eyes, and a murmur ran through the whole room : "The Countess Kaltensee !"

I sat down, feeling I was on coals. Lotta was supremely indifferent to the attention she attracted, and to all appearances absorbed in the music. At the end of the first part she said :

"Now come !"

And again we went through the hall, followed by the inquisitive glances of the audience.

"Were you not pleased ?" I asked, in the dressing-room.

"I did not listen."

"But, Lotta, why did you go ?"

"Because I wished people to see that I have not yet been laid on the shelf by order of the court. And that it is not my pleasure to disappear suddenly like a flash of light."

She took my arm as she spoke, and chatted gayly as she went along the quiet street—of Rome, of her coming winter there—and of her many plans for the future. When we reached the corner by the castle, the servants hastened ahead to open the doors.

"Lotta," I said, "did you get the envelope—the letter that I left on your writing-table

last evening, and the line of explanation I wrote?"

"Yes, indeed! And it was turned into ashes hours ago; it burned as briskly as such a paper upon which so perfidious a matter was written, could burn. Good-night, Helena."

"Have you heard from Prince Otto to-day?"

"Yes, indeed, just as usual."

"Good news, Lotta?" She laughed carelessly.

"What else? Good-night, Helena."

And so day followed day—nothing of importance occurring to disturb our quiet life.

Lotta went driving as usual, and always appeared with a smiling and contented air; the autumn winds often carried to us the tones of her piano as she sat playing. She walked in that part of the castle gardens that was visible from the public highways; and here I saw her one day as I was returning from the town. I was frightened by her appearance and hastened to her. Her face was ghastly pale, her eyes were heavy, and her cheeks were flaming red, and their color was intensified by the little black dotted veil which she wore.

"Oh, Lotta," I cried, "are you ill?"

"No," she answered, walking beside me.

"You look so feverish."

“Bah! I am well. Do you think I will let the people around here pity me because I am pale and miserable? A little rouge answers my purpose at present.”

“Tell me, Lotta,” I begged, “does Prince Otto know of his father’s designs?”

She hesitated a moment before she answered.

“He has assuredly received the letter in which I told him about Herr von Oerzen’s visit and mission, for I have had answers to other matters which were contained in it. But to that—he has not referred in any letter.”

“And what do you make out of that, Lotta?”

“That he does not wish to disturb me, and will communicate to the duke his intentions.”

“And you will just have to wait?”

“I have written to him several times to send me some definite answer.”

Each day Lotta grew paler and more anxious looking, but she would not talk of her troubles, and walked and rode more than formerly, showing a brave front to the towns-people.

I could only pray to God to do for her what he deemed best.

Everything went on as usual at the castle. Letters, presents, flowers arrived daily, and Lotta painted, and sat at her piano for hours, playing and singing.

One morning she told me that she had written to her friend, Fräulein von Reckenthien, to announce her departure for Berlin. She would go about the middle of September, and take Anita with her as waiting-maid.

A few mornings later a messenger boy came to our house with a telegram, which Frau Roden afterward declared was the most precious missive she had ever received in her life. With the cry: "Helena, they are coming to-night!" she opened the door of my room. "Ah, the great, good God!"

"We shall arrive this evening at eight o'clock.

"MÜLLER."

The despatch came from Cologne. And now there was life in the house. "Sophia, children—into the garden: cut some greens and flowers!" called their excited old mistress. "Mamsell," to the housekeeper, "see that the youngest hens are killed; child, Helena, don't you believe he will be able to eat chicken and apple cream? He is so fond of apple cream, Mamsell. Helena dear, a laurel wreath! Dear heart, go over to the castle garden and make one, the finest you can weave for him!"

And she hastened out through the kitchen into the court. "Jurgen, see that the carriage is



washed and in order, and run over to the superintendent's office and tell him from me that the young master will be at home to-day ! And tell Doctor Rother to be here by eight o'clock,—one cannot be sure when they will arrive ; order a cask of beer from the brewery for yourselves. At five o'clock we will start, Jurgen ; I am going to Triebelsburg myself to bring my boy home."

The house was, indeed, in an uproar the greater part of that day ; the hall was littered with greens and autumn blossoms, and Frau Roden and I, with what maids were not needed elsewhere, were soon making garlands and festooning the walls. In the middle of her work the Frau stopped suddenly and put her hands over her face.

"Only think, Helena, of the poor people who have no need to make wreaths !—the dead cannot return."

About mid-day two large fir-trees were bound to the pillars at the entrance to the court, and a garland was hung from one to the other ; and in the centre was suspended a transparency with a verse setting forth the bravery of the German soldiers, and how the French had been defeated.

The old shepherd had seen to that. Mamsell did not find the verse much to her taste, but she

saw that the old servant had no other thought than to say something flattering to the young master, so she took it in good part. The old man had used the same rhyme when he had welcomed another soldier, also a "Herr Roden," back from the battle-field of Leipsic.

"To be sure," said the old man, "he left a leg behind him, but he brought back a Cross of the Legion."

That must have been Fritz's great-uncle.

By evening everything was in readiness; wreaths were placed over all the doors—festoons hung from the centre lamps to the four corners of the room—flowers were everywhere. The choicest silver and glass, and the finest table linen had been brought out.

The happy mother was attired in a rich black silk, with pale blue ribbons fluttering from her dainty cap, and rare old lace at her neck and wrists.

In his room alone were no flowers or garlands, only the laurel wreath on a little table by his bed.

And now with what a joyous face she goes to the carriage, and the maids follow laden with pillows and rugs and foot-rests.

I sat in my room above looking out at her, while in my lap lay a letter just received from

my guardian. He told me that he could get me admitted into the Elizabeth Hospital ; and wished to know how it happened that I was desirous of leaving a place where I had at first been so well satisfied.

Ah, I could not tell him ; that was my secret. But I regretted keenly that I had so long delayed letting Frau Roden know my plans and desires. She would say to me often : “ In the winter, Helena, we will finish that large rug I began for Fritz ; ” or, “ Helena, you will have to be diligent for me when the winter comes ; my eyes are troubling me a great deal ; ” or, “ Dear child, you must learn to play whist ; it will be a change for you in the long winter evenings, and help amuse the invalid, too.”

Then my tongue would cleave to the roof of my mouth, and I could not utter a syllable. And so the weeks had slipped by and nothing had been decided upon—only I felt I could not remain.

I could not conceal from myself that I was feverishly excited to-day—was afraid of this meeting. Day and night had I thought of him, and since the hour when his mother had said, weeping, “ Helena, what shall become of us ? ” my thoughts had become rebellious, and I could not control them ; but ever and anon a voice

would whisper warningly in my ear : "You poor thing, have you forgotten that you are only the beautiful Lotta's sister?"

No, no ; I would be rational. He was a friend, a brother, an invalid, sick in body and soul, for his heart would never recover from the blow Lotta had given it.

I sat a long time at the window, in the twilight, thinking and planning and dreaming. The moon rose over the castle, and the chestnuts cast their long shadows upon our court beneath. At last I heard the rumbling of carriage wheels, and the steady, slow tread of the horses.

I started downstairs to meet them, but my limbs trembled, and I was pale and nervous when I joined the household, already assembled at the door to greet their dear master.

The carriage came slowly into the court and up to the broad steps. The coachman made a motion with his hand as if to say :

"No noise ! We are not well enough yet for any loud expressions of joy."

I hurried down the steps to the carriage door.

"Fritz," I heard his mother say, "here we are ; and there is Helena."

Then a voice spoke :

"Good-day, Fräulein Helena !"

It was Herr Müller, who had just sprung from

the carriage, as Jurgen got down from the box, and they both came to the carriage door. Frau Roden got out at once. I could not see her countenance, but she pressed my hand hard.

"Be very careful," she begged; and now they lifted him out.

He was so thin and ghastly looking I stood back alarmed and frightened.

"Hush! Don't appear to notice any change," she whispered; "we must be careful."

Could this be the strong, handsome man that had gone away scarcely three months ago, so full of life and strength?

They carried him in like a child, and when the bright light fell upon him I could hardly realize that the deeply sunken eyes and emaciated face belonged to the Fritz Roden whom I had known.

"Get me to bed, mother," I heard him whisper; "when I am lying down I may feel able to see my people."

All was silent in the large hall. The wreaths and greens seemed to hang in bitter irony over the doors, and the table laden with good things, which stood ready as if for a festival, was like a cruel jest.

"Run at once for Doctor Rother," ordered the mistress, "he should have been here sooner."

Then she disappeared in the sick-room.

"The Saviour have mercy," whispered Mamsell as the tears ran down her heavy red cheeks.

The people all went back to their own quarters with sad faces and eyes downcast, and I stood alone in the festal room.

Soon Frau Roden came out of her son's room followed by Jurgen, who went directly to the kitchen. "Helena," she whispered, coming close to me, "are you resolved to go back to Berlin as a nurse?"

I looked at her, frightened at her question.

"I know all about it, Helena, though I have said nothing to you. If it does not cost you too great a sacrifice, there in that room is an invalid, and the work you seek lies close at hand."

I could say nothing, but put my hand in hers.

"God will reward you," she said, "that you do not forsake me now!"

I went up to my room and put on an apron and noiseless slippers, and came back as quickly as possible.

She was going through the hall with a pitcher of water and a roll of linen in her hand.

"I am ready to take my place at once," was all I said.

She handed me what she carried without a word. "Now come, my child."

Softly we went into the room and up to his bed ; his eyes were closed and he looked terribly exhausted ; the wounded arm lay upon the cover. The bandages had become loosened by the long journey ; I began gently to unwind them. As I did so he opened his eyes and looked at me, and a pleasant smile crossed his wan face.

“ Ah, it is you, Fräulein Helena ? ” he said cordially ; “ you are going to do it ? ”

As he spoke he offered me his well hand.

“ It seems worse than it really is ; I am weak from my journey. How good it is to be home again ! ”

“ Yes, my own dear boy, ” said his mother, “ now we will soon nurse you back to health, but do not talk so much. ”

When Doctor Rother visited him, I received my first instructions in nursing the wounded.

“ Care, Fräulein von Werthern, and good diet, ” said the friendly old man. “ Hold the arm this way—that’s right—we are very fortunate to secure the services of a young woman with such soft, white hands—do you know that, lady ? ”

“ You seem to understand it, too, doctor, ” Fritz responded in a bantering tone.

“ Yes, yes, that I do ! Now, you must be quiet, and with good things to eat, and fresh air



and patience, we'll have you on your legs before you know it. And, my dear young Fräulein, diet's the thing."

He patted the sick man on the face as though he were a child, and then left the room to get something to eat. Frau Roden was delighted to think all her preparations had not been in vain.

I accompanied the old man to the table where Müller was already seated. "Now give us your company, Fräulein," he said, as he poured out a glass of red wine.

"Doctor," I asked, "is he very ill?"

"Pretty bad—he's frightfully weak. But we'll be able to bring him around."

"We have nothing to fear?"

"Fear? fear? If I get a splinter in my hand I have something to fear. But don't get alarmed, little Fräulein,—see how beautifully the chicken is browned." And the good man set bravely to work to dispose of the viands that were placed before him; and soon he and Müller were talking of the campaign, and Müller was relating some of the horrors of the hospital.

When the doctor finally looked at his watch, he rose hurriedly, and as he put on his hat and coat, he whispered to me: "He will have fever, Fräulein von Werthern, but do not allow his mother to become anxious or excited; the wound

has become inflamed by the long journey. If he is greatly distressed, put cracked ice on his head ; there's plenty of it in the cellar, I have no doubt. I'll be here early in the morning."

"Has the journey injured him greatly?" I asked anxiously.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Dear child, it is a great damage, but a long journey by rail is never an advantage to any one. It is a thousand times better for him to lie here than in a crowded fever-fraught room in the hospital. Hold your head up and be cheerful, or I cannot make use of you for a nurse."

No, I had little time for brooding ; there came hard days, and long, anxious nights ; there were hours in which the invalid suffered fearful pain : times when all clear consciousness left him, and he would call "Lotta ! Lotta !" over and over again, and my hands would tremble as I put the fresh, cold cloths on his brow.

"It is not alone the wound," the old doctor said ; "it is the after effects of the excitement and the marches ; they all work together."

During these first weeks I did not see Lotta ; I only knew that she had not gone to Berlin, and that she took her walks and drives as usual.

The 30th of October was a genuine autumn day. The wind drove the dead leaves against

the window panes, and now and then came a shower, reminding one of April. In the sick-room the fire had been started for the first time, and the flames roared merrily in the white porcelain stove, as though they rejoiced in the favor shown them by man.

In spite of the black clouds which were chasing each other across the sky, all was bright within.

Fritz had for the first time asserted his manhood again, and declared he must know what was in the newspapers.

“You cannot do it, dear mother; you strain both eyes and voice; but Fräulein Helena”—he turned his head toward me and looked at me.

“I bother you too much, do I not?” He held out the well hand and pressed mine warmly. “But I must know if we are at Paris yet.”

I ran quickly to the living-room to fetch the newspaper and a lamp, and caught myself singing softly as I went. Glancing a moment through the window my eye rested on the castle, and I remembered that I had intended to run across to Lotta for a few moments that day, but I could do that after dinner.

Taking up the paper I passed out into the hall. The cellar doors stood open, and the maids were carrying down great baskets of splendid winter apples, and the odor of the fruit filled the house

Just at that moment the bell rang loudly and the hall door was flung open violently; Anita rushed in, pale and terror-stricken.

“Is she here?” she cried.

“Who? My sister?”

“Yes, the countess; I saw her running in this direction.”

“No,” I said in alarm.

“Then she’s in the garden or in your old rooms,” and the woman hurried out again.

I threw the newspaper on the floor, and rushed out after her. I overtook her at the garden-gate, which was wide open.

“Anita, for God’s sake, what is it?” I exclaimed.

“She must have received bad news; she was almost distracted, and I fear she may do something desperate. Fräulein, that’s the river Rote flowing down there.”

I flew forward like an arrow. “Lotta! Lotta!” I cried, but the rushing of the wind through the tree-tops drowned my voice, and in my ears rang the ominous words, “one leap from the bridge.”

“Oh, Lotta, Lotta! not that, not that!”

“Lotta! Lotta!” My terror was so great, I hardly know whether my voice sounded at all through the lonely woods. At last I saw her kneeling on the river’s very edge, with one hand

thrown across the dead branch of an old tree which overhung the water. "Lotta, what—what are you doing?" I cried as I ran to her. She turned her head toward me, and it was yet light enough for me to see that her face was deathly white, and that her eyes burned with a wild, excited light.

"I?—nothing! It is so hard!" she murmured, and threw herself, with a gesture of despair, on the ground at my feet.

"Come," I said, as I bent over her, "come, Lotta," and I held out my hands to assist her to rise.

She said no word, but rose and walked by my side for a short distance.

"Where are you going, Lotta?"

"To our old rooms."

"Not there by yourself, Lotta?"

"I will not go back to the castle." And she withdrew her arm from mine.

"No, Lotta; come with me to my room, the little one we occupied together, you know, the first night we came to Rotenberg. Over there it is so cold, and everything is musty and in disorder. Come!"

She followed me like a child.

As we entered the court I saw Anita standing among the trees, waiting to see what her mistress

would do. When she saw that Lotta would go with me, she turned toward the castle, without letting Lotta perceive that she had been watching her. Lotta followed me into that house, across whose threshold she had never set foot since she had broken her faith with its master.

She evidently had no thought about that now, but followed me up the stairs with slow, weary tread, and into the little room which contained many home trifles which had been familiar to us from our childhood.

“Now sit down, Lotta, or rest on the bed, and tell me what has happened,—what bad news you have had.” As I spoke, she threw herself, with a cry of despair, upon the floor, and flung her hands upon her head as if her thoughts almost drove her mad. It was not possible to restrain her. “If Hans were only alive,” she moaned. “If my brother were only alive this day !”

How little she had thought of Hans lately, I tried not to remember. I called Frau Roden to help me, and at last we got my poor distracted Lotta into bed, where she lay passive, but looking more like a corpse than a living being.

Frau Roden whispered :

“Helena, what has happened ?”

I could not tell her, for I did not know myself. At last Lotta handed me the crumpled letter

which she still held, as answer to my many questions. It was from the prince.

With burning eyes I read his words; passionate, tender ones they were, assurances of undying love, and at the last the words :

“ My parents seem to have been in a diabolical haste to get me to marry a girl suitable to my station ; the widow of my brother will not run away, so I will not let them rob me of my life’s happiness yet awhile.—We will discuss this affair when we meet. I think in the mean time we will not spoil our charming correspondence with such vexatious matters.”

The letters danced before my eyes, and I read the next few words :

“ Only external barriers—for we will never part.”

Poor Lotta ! Now I understood her despair.

“ Poor Lotta ! ” I bent over her, laid my hand on the brow that was now so hot and feverish.

“ Have I deserved it ? ” And she pulled her wedding-ring off violently and threw it across the room, as though he stood before her and she meant to dash it at his feet. “ Wed your new bride with that ring ! ” she shrieked, as she raised herself in bed, “ but don’t think my eyes will ever rest on you again ! ” She sat, trembling with anger, and burning with fever



I could do nothing. The doctor must be sent for immediately.

“What is it, doctor?” whispered Frau Roden anxiously.

He answered with a quieting word, wrote his prescription, and shrugged his shoulders. After a while I ventured to say :

“Will she get worse, dear doctor?”

“We may expect it,” he answered, in his crisp way, as he went out.

She was wildly delirious, but as the medicine began to have its effect she became quieter. She was in the garden—in the moonlight—walking with her husband, and listening to the nightingales. “Otto,” she said, “it seems like heaven.” Then she chatted about her bridal wreath, about their separation, and begged him to come back soon. After a time her mood changed :

“Hans, avenge me! Shoot him dead, dead!”

Her delirium continued until the gray morning, when she fell into a quiet sleep. I threw myself on the sofa in the little sitting-room, and thought it all over; I had expected it, had felt assured that Lotta's days of happiness and ignorance were numbered, and yet the certainty was a terrible shock. I fell into an uneasy slumber, and wakened to find the sun shining brightly into my

room, and before me at the table stood—Lotta. She looked frightfully pale, her hair and dress were in disorder, and her face wore a singular expression.

“How do you feel, Lotta? Why did you not remain in bed?”

“I am not tired now,” she answered listlessly, “only cold.”

I made her lie down on the sofa, and covered her, and put fresh wood in the stove; then I brought her a cup of hot coffee. She drank it, and sat back in a corner of the sofa, regardless of what was going on about her.

I got my brushes, and tried to arrange her hair; she was lost in thought, and I trembled as I caught a glance of her eyes, it was so dark and sinister. I did not try to look into them again, and I ceased speaking, for she did not hear me, and no reply came from those colorless lips. At mid-day she was still sitting in the same place. When the physician came in she dismissed him. “She was quite well,” she said.

Frau Roden received no more attention than I, and her questions to Lotta went unanswered, also. We stood at my chamber door and whispered together.

“Let her alone; it is the crisis,” she said, “and

come down to Fritz for a while ; I had hoped to keep all this from him, but the doctor took it for granted he knew all about it, so spoke out, as he always does—but come, he is very uneasy and disturbed to-day.”

“ If I only knew what to do,” I said.

“ His arm is not well yet, remember, Helena ; but—Fritz must be discreet,” and she sighed deeply.

I went down to his room, where he lay on the sofa, to which he was removed for a part of each day now. Books and papers were scattered around, but he had not attempted to read. Perhaps it was only my idea, but I thought his “ good-day ” had an abrupt, cold sound, and he glanced at the clock, which stood on the table near his couch.

It was three o'clock.

“ Have you no time for me ? ” he grumbled, as I sat down by the window and took up one of the papers to read aloud to him.

I looked at him rather surprised ; his face was red, and he was nervously biting at his blonde beard.

“ Yes, I have time.”

“ Really ? ”

The word had a comical sound, but an anxious one, too.

“ Really ? No, you need not read ; I am too nervous, too restless to listen.”

I put down the paper and looked out of the window. What was I to do ? Here was sitting Lotta’s sister, while overhead was Lotta herself, whom he could never forget—ill, and broken-hearted and forsaken.

“ I pray you, Fräulein von Werthern,” he said, after a moment, “ do not remain here on my account ; you are surely more needed elsewhere.”

I rose at once.

“ I am going now ; your mother sent me here because, she said, Lotta needed quiet, and you amusement. I will neither forget nor neglect my duty toward Lotta.”

I threw the paper on the table and hurried from the room, for the hot tears had forced themselves into my eyes. I understood it all : his anxiety for Lotta, his fear that she was being neglected, had overpowered him. I felt—I knew it would always be so.

Toward evening Lotta spoke.

“ Helena, can I have some writing paper ? ”

I hastened to bring my portfolio, and lit a lamp for her. She sat down at the table, but her hands trembled, and she left great blots on the sheet as she wrote. The letter was short, and was soon finished.

“Helena, I want you to post that yourself. I want it to go at once.”

I took it and hurried off with it; it was to the prince.

As I returned I met Anita at the door; she carried a letter and a despatch in her hand.

“These letters are for the countess; will you kindly deliver them for me?”

“From the prince, Anita?”

“Yes,” she answered, as she turned away.

As I entered my room Lotta was pacing excitedly up and down the room, with a set expression around her mouth.

“That creature has been impertinent enough to make me feel that”—she stood before me with her hands clenched, as if I had interrupted her speech.

“Who, Lotta? Whom do you mean?”

“Anita I mean—whom else? I have sent word for her to bring me several things, and she is too long.” And she began again her excited walk.

I lit the lamp and drew the curtains without speaking.

“It is suffocating here,” said Lotta impatiently, and pushed the door into the sleeping-room open with her foot. “These rooms are as confined as prisons; one cannot breathe.”

Some one knocked at the door, and on opening it, I found Anita with a small willow hamper in her hand, covered with a cloth. I set it on the table. Lotta threw aside the cover hastily.

“What did you bring these things for?” she said angrily, throwing back some of her recently acquired possessions. “Do you think that I am a beggar? Here!”

She picked up a morocco case, which had a monogram upon it in gold, and opening it, flung one jewel after another at Anita’s feet, with the excited exclamation, “Here!” as each piece was thrown. Then she opened a well-filled purse, and threw the gold pieces at her. Some of them, well aimed, struck the head of the patient woman, and all rolled over the floor of our little room.

“What did I tell you?” she cried. “I said my letters! How dare you come here with this plunder? You can gather it up and take it back where you found it; I will have none of it.” And she spitefully kicked a bracelet that she had thrown in a corner.

We stood speechless.

She had by this time gotten hold of her letter-box, and, hastily unlocking it, sat down before the fire, watching the letters blaze as she put them in one by one.

“For God’s sake, countess, do not burn those letters,” cried Anita, pale and trembling, as she went to her side; “do not destroy them, destroy nothing. Every word the prince has written you will avail you now; they will be your witnesses in the future.”

“Go!” ordered Lotta shortly.

“Countess, do listen to reason,” pleaded the woman.

“Go!” repeated the angry wife, in a louder tone, as she sat and watched her hopes, her happiness, her all, burn to ashes.

Shaking her head, Anita turned, gathered together the gold and jewels, and silently left the room.

Lotta looked at one letter; poor girl, she seemed for a second to hesitate; then she flung it fiercely after the others. What need to keep the loving words, since they were only written, not felt?

I could not bear the sight, and turned and went into the adjoining room. Soon I heard loud laughter, almost a shriek, and going back, I found she had opened a satchel and taken from it the myrtle wreath—the wedding wreath. She had it on her head, and laughed long and loud—just such a despairing laugh as I heard Anita give at times.



“Lotta, dear Lotta!” I cried, as I took the wreath from her head. I feared her reason had left her. She sank, weak and exhausted, on the nearest chair, and put her hands over her face with another shriek that was like the cry of a lost soul.

Trembling, I threw the wreath back in the satchel with the rose wreath, which had also been preserved;—flowers which only bloomed for a day, but the thorns were still sharp enough to pierce a human heart.

I kneeled down by her and put my arms around her, but she pushed me back. “Don’t touch me, I am tired to death!”

As she spoke, she rose slowly and went into the sleeping-room. I followed her, and she threw herself exhausted on the bed. She lay as quietly as if she were dead, and, leaning over her, I could hear her regular breathing, telling me that rest had come, for a time at least.

I heard a low knock at the door, and found Frau Roden waiting outside. I put my finger on my lips to impose silence until I had closed the door.

“Child,” she whispered, “has any one been laughing loudly up here? Fritz said he was sure he heard some one laughing.”

“It was Lotta,” I answered; “her nerves are all unstrung; she was terribly excited.”

“If she would only sleep or cry.”

“I believe she has fallen asleep,” I answered; “she is exhausted.”

“Cannot you give us a few moments now? I bandaged Fritz’s arm, but he was not very well satisfied, I was so awkward. It is so bad, Helena, when one’s sight fails.”

I hastened to Fritz, and hoped I might be able to straighten his bandages a little, but he turned his face to the wall. I could not determine whether he was suffering or impatient. “Fritz,” I began, “may I read you something this evening?”

“Oh, do not trouble yourself.”

“I should be glad to do it, but if you have other thoughts——”

“How do you know anything about my thoughts?” he answered petulantly, as only a sick man can.

I gave no answer. His voice and manner made me sad.

“Are you crying?” he asked sharply. And, as I took up the book without answering, and began reading, I felt my voice tremble at the first word. He gazed at me attentively for a moment, and then closed his eyes. I had read but a

short time, when I stopped suddenly ; my attention was arrested by the sound of footsteps pacing up and down in the room above. She had not rested after all.

“Go on reading,” said Fritz.

At that moment the steps came to a sudden stop, and I rose to go and see if Lotta wanted me, but Fritz said to his mother :

“Go and see if anything has happened ! And you remain here ; this excitement is telling on you, Fräulein von Werthern. ’

It was, indeed ; but I hardly felt that it was possible for me to remain there quietly.

“Poor child !” he said softly, and gazed up at the ceiling.

Did he mean Lotta ?

“She is very ill,” I answered. After a while Frau Roden came back. “Do not be alarmed, Helena,” she said quietly ; “pain soon dies out in such natures.”

“Go on reading,” said Fritz, as if he had not heard his mother. But I could read no more that night ; my head, my eyes, my heart ached, and I could not trust myself to start again. He took the book from me with an impatient movement and began reading aloud, but after a few words threw it down again. He was singularly unlike himself that evening.

He began again, a minute later, reading to himself, however. This time he was soon so absorbed in his book that I thought I could slip away unperceived. But when I rose softly he put the book down and looked at me.

“Where are you going?”

“I am anxious about Lotta.”

He did not answer, but a dark expression came over his face, and he turned his head away sullenly.





## CHAPTER XII.

IT was a time of severe trial for me. Lotta sank into a distressing apathy. She would not dress, nor eat, nor sleep. Every effort to inspire her with new energy was fruitless. She sat crouching all day in the corner of the sofa, dressed in her morning wrapper, her hair caught up in a simple knot, her arms folded, and her eyes fixed on a single spot.

I pleaded with her; I scolded her; she scarcely noticed me. Frau Roden remonstrated earnestly with her; she never moved a feature. Only once was she aroused from this condition, and that was on receipt of a letter from the prince. With trembling hand she wrote upon the cover that the person addressed would receive no letters. She noted the same reply upon a letter written her by the lord chamberlain.

Nine days passed in this way without change. And this in a house to which she had brought ingratitude and infidelity, but she never thought of that; and what did she think of during that

time? She was coining a terrible design—I learned what it was later.

Downstairs I never heard a word against Lotta. If ever the biblical admonition: "Do good to them who despitefully use you," was conscientiously followed, it was in that old mansion house. The doctor ordered wine, and the best the cellar afforded stood before the speechless young wife. Frau Roden brought flowers and fruit, and placed them silently before her: no word of thanks acknowledged the kind attention.

The house was becoming uncanny.

And with all this the door-bell rang constantly. Persons who for weeks and months had not called, now came to inquire after the condition of the "patient" with a zeal which made me blush with shame, and brought a shrewd, sarcastic smile to the lips of Frau Roden.

Her son was doing quite well, she answered coolly and politely; but not a syllable about her who had taken refuge under her roof, no matter how bold an allusion the visitor ventured. But we learned, nevertheless, how great the excitement was in the town.

The air was full of the most incredible rumors. The report that Lotta had, in her distress, fallen at the feet of her former lover and besought his



pardon, was passed from lip to lip with a thousand variations.

I went about as if on burning coals. What should we do now? Lotta could not remain longer here—that was certain; and, in her present condition, it was impossible for me to let her go alone. I must go with her—but where? And how were we to live? If I had work from early till late, it would hardly suffice for Lotta, and we had not a penny.

We had no news from the Court, and were ignorant whether the divorce proceedings had begun or not.

“Charlotte,” I began, one afternoon, as I tried with soft words to persuade her to take a cup of coffee, while she impatiently pushed away the hand in which I held the beverage, “Charlotte, I must talk seriously with you now. We cannot go on in this way any longer. What have you resolved upon? What answer have you given the lord chamberlain? You must see that we cannot remain any longer in this house. Please tell me what you intend to do.”

She looked at me and shrugged her shoulders.

“I have thrown their miserable pension in their faces,” she answered at last.

“That was very inconsiderate of you, Charlotte,” I said, in a tone of reproof.



She shrugged her shoulders again, and said, in a listless tone :

“It is all the same to me.”

The words which she had repeated from day to day.

In despair, I ran downstairs into the sitting-room, where Frau Roden sat at the window, knitting.

“What shall we do, dear Frau Roden?” I asked, “what shall we do?”

She comprehended my question, and replied :

“Patience, Helena ; she is ill yet ; she is one of those natures who never rise very high and cannot fall very low. Patience.”

“But she must not longer be a burden to you.”

She stroked my face with her hand.

“She is not a burden to me, Helena. I have only one apprehension,” and her eyes turned with a troubled look toward the little door which led into her son’s chamber. “I am afraid he has not yet quite overcome,” she whispered, nodding sorrowfully. “He is impatient, and he listens to every step overhead. I wanted to change his quarters and bring him again into his old room, which looks out on the court-yard ; but when I spoke of it, he became more excited than I ever knew him to be before. He never

asks about her, Helena, but I know what I know ; he cannot dissemble before me."

I, too, saw it all so plainly. If I could only see a way out of it all.

"I will do everything in my power to persuade Lotta to go away," I said; "it will do her good, and I——"

"You, Helena? I did not mean you," interrupted the old lady. "And where would you go? No, just wait until Charlotte is better, until the divorce affair is settled. Do not be anxious; I will be watchful. Study how we can make my boy more cheerful, for unless we can do so he will not get any better."

Days passed without any change in Lotta's condition. The November storms were upon us, and the dreary weather depressed our hearts still further. The only one who appeared calm was Fritz. The anxious mother assured me to the contrary; but it seemed to me he was uniformly content when I bound his arm, or sat reading aloud at his bedside.

We had laid all books aside, but I had to read a great deal more from the newspapers, for Metz and Paris were now the objects of our chief concern.

One afternoon, as I was about to leave our room, there was a knock. It was Anita, with a

letter for Lotta. I did not wait to learn its contents, for I knew that I was expected in the sick-chamber below. The coffee-urn stood on the little table, and the *Gazette* lay close by. Frau Roden sat at her son's side and held his hand.

"Helena," she exclaimed, "he is growing impatient; hurry with the coffee; it does not taste right unless you pour it out."

We were soon sitting cosily around the little table, and I took up the newspaper and began to read.

"Some one is walking upstairs," interrupted Fritz.

"It is Anita," I explained, and went on reading. We forgot everything for a time, until Fritz at last exclaimed:

"Heavens, it is growing dark! Do not read any more, Fräulein von Werthern; you must spare your eyes."

We talked a few moments over what we had read, and then Frau Roden left the room. Fritz talked on in his quiet way; what he said was clear and simple, like all that he did and was. He was not a talkative man, but that evening he seemed disposed to continue conversation, and I listened with deep pleasure to his earnest words. Suddenly he ceased speaking, for we

heard in the room above the sound of a piano. It was Lotta, playing; no one else played like that. But how did she come to do so? Clear and sweet the notes floated down to us. It was Chopin's wonderful funeral march, and right in the midst of the piece she broke off abruptly and ran into a mazurka.

"What does that mean?" I said to myself, and looked furtively at Fritz. He lay quite still, and listened.

She played on and on, and the music sounded brighter and merrier, as if she had at last awakened from a long dream of pain.

"Fräulein von Werthern," said Fritz abruptly, "I have read 'Ekkehard' through without you. Will you be angry with me?"

"Not at all," I responded.

"And there is one passage, near the end of the volume—it is the most beautiful in the whole book—so simple, so moving and so true; or perhaps I think so, only because the passage went home to my heart."

The music had come to an end as suddenly as it had begun. I heard Lotta moving about overhead, but I could not find courage to go up and ask what the playing meant; neither could I bring myself to ask Fritz Roden what the passage in "Ekkehard" was to which he had alluded.

But he began, without waiting for me to answer him.

“Do you know, Helena, that it is just a year ago to-day that you came to Rotenberg? Just at this time of the day, too, you first crossed our threshold. Have you thought of it to-day? I have not forgotten it. Did I not speak, that night, of roses that should bloom for you and yours in Rotenberg? Do you remember it? And yet instead of roses came thorns; instead of happiness, came disaster, death, sickness, and other things sadder still. It has been a painful year for us all; and yet I would not wish to have escaped the wounds which it has brought me. You cannot know, Helena, how delicious it is to get well; for one who has never been sick, can never feel the joy of recovery. You think it strange that I should speak in this way. I am not of a poetic nature, but for some days past I have felt as if spring had entered into my soul. I have hard work to remain here on the sofa. I would like to get out into the fresh air, to be with my regiment, and follow the victorious march of our troops. Yet I cannot move my arm, and am, for the time being, a cripple. But the longing is there. Now, then, have you no word for me?”

Ah—Lotta! He loved her still; and the

spring which shone within him was her prospective liberty. I felt again as I did on that evening when he said to me: "Speak to your sister for me." Poor fool that I was!

"Did the piano playing disturb you?" asked Frau Roden, in an anxious voice, as she entered the room at that moment.

"Not in the slightest," he replied.

"If it does, perhaps it would be better for you to take your old room again?"

He shook his head. "No; it is so delightful to be next to you—let me remain here."

And as I rose and went out he called after me: "I beg you not to tell the countess that we can hear her playing so distinctly, for it really does not disturb me at all."

When I went upstairs Lotta was standing at the window; she turned her head toward me as I entered, saying:

"I have a letter from the lord chamberlain. They are so enormously gracious that they are willing to allow me time for reflection as to whether I will accept or refuse the pension; the money is at my command any moment. The present heir apparent has himself determined the amount. Until the expiration of this period of probation, I am to remain here in Rotenberg. Everything else in respect to the divorce will be

arranged without difficulty. The worthy man gives me the paternal advice to regard myself as the prince's widow, and the so-called alimony as his legacy. Very kind of him."

She was speaking in her old, scornful tone.

"Lotta," I said firmly, "you cannot remain for weeks in this house!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"And you must have money to rent a respectable lodging, until you can get your affairs in order."

"I have nothing, for I will accept nothing from yonder," and she made a gesture toward the castle. "Moreover, we must have some of grandmother's money yet," she added.

"Grandmother's money?" I cried; "you know that we sold her earrings, to pay back to the Rodens the sum which you borrowed for Hans."

"Then I don't know what we can do," she declared, and turned again to the window. "Do as you please."

"I will speak with Frau Roden, Lotta."

"Pray do," she answered indifferently.

The following day was Sunday. The doctor had given Fritz permission to leave his room on that day, and take his first meal with us. Frau Roden walked around the table in quiet bliss,



now straightening the table-cloth, now filling the vases with flowers, now looking at the champagne glasses, to see if they shone properly. The doctor had declared the sparkling beverage especially good for convalescents.

The sun shone clear and bright. It was a glorious Sunday morning. When all was done, the old lady seated herself in her easy-chair, by the window, to watch the worshippers come home from church. I drew my chair to her side, and began to talk to her of Lotta.

“What do you want to do, child?” she asked.

I explained to her that Lotta could not leave Rotenberg until the divorce was consummated, and that she on no account would remain in this house; and so I was thinking if it would not be possible for Lotta and me to take our old lodgings again, and for me to give piano lessons.

“What do you want to move for? Why can she not go alone? And why should you give music lessons?” asked the old lady.

“I cannot let Lotta go alone, in her present temper.”

“Let her take Anita with her. Do you intend to be a Cinderella all your life for her?”

“Lotta is too proud to accept anything from the prince.”

“Too proud,” said the old lady fretfully, “she is his lawful wife ; and although this marriage should be dissolved from considerations of political necessity, nevertheless it is his duty to secure to the woman an independence, and that will be done. I know the duke well enough to be sure that he will do what is right, though the alliance had been a hundred times more distasteful to him than it was. Too proud, did you say? Ugh !”

I was utterly confused ; the gentle old lady had never spoken so bitterly before ; but I was relieved from the necessity of answering, for just at that moment the door opened noiselessly, and Fritz entered the room.

His mother flew from her seat to meet him. “God be praised, my boy !” said she, as she reached up to kiss him.

“God be praised, indeed !” he replied, looking with evident delight around the pleasant and sunny room. He seated himself in the chair which his mother had just vacated, and while she stood by his side, lovingly smoothing his hair, he turned to me and said :

“I hear that you want to move, Fräulein von Werthern. That I would never permit. Please say to your sister, in my name, that the room upstairs is at her disposal as long as she has need of

it. To us it will be a pleasant duty to afford her this asylum."

Frau Roden turned pale, and stared at her son in speechless anxiety. He did not appear to notice her distress ; but taking her hand in his, he asked :

"We were always cordial, hospitable people, were we not, mother dear ? and we shall always be so, shall we not, mother ?" he added, with somewhat greater emphasis.

"You are the master of the house," she replied apathetically, and, turning away, pretended to occupy herself with dusting the yellow hat of a china shepherdess which stood on a cabinet behind her, but I saw that her hand trembled.

"Are you agreed ?" he asked of me, smiling as he spoke.

"I have nothing to say. I think Lotta is the one to decide."

"Certainly," he rejoined quietly ; "ask your sister."

I let him send me away like a child, and went upstairs to Lotta. She was standing before the mirror fastening a brooch in her dress, and had just completed her toilet. It seemed to me she looked more beautiful than ever, in the simple black mourning gown which she had worn for

our father, and which I had never seen on her since she had become the Countess Kaltensee, until now.

Her apparent insensibility to her situation angered me. I sat down at the window without saying a word, while she added the finishing touches to her toilet, before the looking-glass.

“What makes you so quiet, Helena?” she began, at last, without taking her eyes from the mirror. “Have you been speaking with Frau Roden?”

“Yes, just now,” I answered with difficulty.

“Well?”

“Fritz Roden sends his respects, and places this room at your disposal, as long as you are pleased to occupy it.”

She looked at me, then, and under her long, dark lashes I saw the flash of a strange fire; but she made no immediate answer. She finished her toilet deliberately, took a few turns up and down the room, and stopping directly in front of me, said:

“I will gratefully accept his kindness.”

Then, with a passing glance at the mirror, she gathered up her train and left the room, and I heard her slowly descending the stairs.

A feeling of terror and despair overcame me. I hurried into my own room, and threw myself

on my knees by my bed, and sobbed like a child.

“Why, Helena, what is the matter with you?” said a gentle voice at my side, and Frau Roden bent over me, with her hand on my shoulder, peering anxiously into my tear-stained face. I saw by her eyes that she had been weeping, also—and I knew why; but nevertheless I gave an evasive answer in reply:

“I was thinking of Hans, and of our future,” I said.

She smiled, as if to say, “I will believe it.”

“Come downstairs, child,” was all she said, “and let no traces of tears be visible in your face.”

And, as I hastened to cool my burning eyes with cold water, she continued:

“I was still standing by the cabinet, when the door opened and Charlotte entered. Child, my heart stood still, and I watched his countenance, to see how he would bear this meeting. He rose and bowed, and declared his gratification to see her again in such good health; he looked down at her as composedly as if they had only parted the day before. He has wonderful command of himself, but I have no doubt he controlled himself for my sake.” She sighed heavily. “He is of age,” she continued, “and all experience teaches

that contradiction and difficulty only intensify the heat of passion. I can only fold my hands and look on, while I silently pray that God may show him the right way."

Meanwhile, Lotta and Fritz Roden were sitting together in the dining-room; he was telling her of St. Privat, and she was playing with the white aster which she had taken from the bowl of flowers on the table. The servant had just brought in the soup, and we gathered around the table. Fritz, as usual, said grace, but I did the honors. I had assumed this office while he was in the army, and his arm was not yet well enough to permit him to supersede me.

It was a painful meal, however; we ate our soup in silence; then Fritz took up the bottle of claret, and after awkwardly filling his glasses with his left hand, he said, with forced gayety:

"A true German cannot abide a Frenchman, but he loves to drink his wine. Let us drink to the health of our troops in the field; with gratitude to them for the valor with which they have protected hearth and home from foreign foes and war's alarms, and secured to us such hours of peace as we enjoy to-day."

Lotta responded at once to his effort to revive our spirits:

"I have often heard grandmother tell how

terrible war is. Her memory of the year 1813 was as fresh as if it were but yesterday."

"Yes; the old lady loved to speak of those days," replied Fritz; "would that she could have lived to see Sedan!"

"Indeed she died too early," continued Lotta, in the same vein; "had she lived, many things would now be different."

She sighed, and looked sadly and dreamily out of the window.

She seemed to make the sudden death of our grandmother responsible for her ill-considered marriage. Poor grandmother, who died of grief over her conduct. I blushed for her.

On the lips of Fritz Roden played a faint smile. His mother, however, remarked coolly:

"Such remarks are often made after the event. My dear old friend was a weary, broken-hearted woman; she had no power to hinder what was already settled. Or have I not understood you correctly, my lady?"

Lotta made no answer. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, but Fritz relieved our embarrassment by promptly changing the subject.

"Fräulein von Werthern, give me another ladle of soup, please; it is the convalescent's hunger, you know; don't forget what I told you yesterday."



Yes, I remembered what he had said ; that he was well in body and soul, and that the joy of spring-time was in his heart.

Lotta and he fell to talking about the campaign again, and Frau Roden gradually took part in the conversation. She did not wish to let Fritz perceive her apprehensions.

After dinner, Lotta and I retired to our rooms ; she tripped upstairs with a light, elastic step, which contrasted singularly with the slow movement of her descent an hour before.

“He looks remarkably well,” she observed, throwing herself on the sofa, and covering herself with a shawl ; “not so red and robust—but he has acquired something of the cavalier. It is a new trait, an effect of his life as a soldier. I, at least, never remarked the quality in him before.”

“You never have understood him,” I retorted bitterly.

“That may be. I never gave myself the trouble,” she replied, and buried herself in her book.

I took my cloak and hat, and went out for a walk. I chose a lonely path through the woods. The dry leaves crackled under my feet, the cool autumn wind played around my brow, the trees and bushes stood sad and bare. As I wandered aimlessly on I sat in judgment upon myself, and

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began to scrutinize my thoughts and feelings. I told myself that I had been selfish, and altogether wanting in womanly pride. What right had I to weep, when in the man's soul the wounds from which he had sorely suffered began to heal, when the old hopes bloomed again? I became bitterly ashamed of the tears which I had shed in the morning; and when, in comfortable self-exculpation, I said to myself: "Lotta certainly does not love him, and he will be unhappy with her," I was equally prompt with the answer: "Nothing in heaven or earth can alter a love like Fritz Roden's, which is the expression of his inmost being, steadfast, enduring, true. Ah, Helena! you will remain as you always have been, 'her sister,' and you will not become bitter or unjust; but you must become proud, very proud." But, alas! this pride gives us at times unbearable pain; 'tis but the mantle which cloaks the wound from the eyes of the world; but the mantle presses and inflames the wound, and the heart rises in revolt when the lips wear a smile, and the whole soul grows ill and miserable. And I thought of the hours which I had passed at his bedside, chatting and reading; thought of the words of his mother, which, in her tenderness for me, she had let fall; and all the foolish thoughts came back; and I saw his eyes, as they

followed me about the sick-chamber, so strangely and so constantly. I felt that my pride was slipping from me again. I turned to retrace my steps through the dreary woods, over which the shadows of the mountains had already fallen. In the distance before me lay the landscape in the full light of the setting sun, and I saw it glisten between the trunks of the lofty beeches, and an eager longing to escape took possession of my soul ; anywhere, anywhere, so that it be a spot where I was not known, where I might throw aside the mask it was crushing me to wear ; but I said to myself, patience ; the way of escape will open in due time.

As I entered the house it was already dusk, and I heard the sound of Lotta's playing. There was no one in the hall, but the door of Fritz's room was ajar, and through the opening came a faint ray of light. He is listening to her music, I thought. I was walking softly toward the stairs when the door was thrown open quickly, and Fritz's voice said impatiently :

“Where have you been so long, Helena?”

“In the woods,” I rejoined.

“What nonsense for you to go about alone in the woods.”

I laughed. “I have always gone alone up to this time.”

“But you must not do it,” he cried vehemently; “you are too young to be tramping about in that manner.”

“I—too young!” I cried, half amused and half incensed. I, who had thought myself so old. I seemed never to have had any youth; and no one had ever before objected to my going about alone.

“Yes, you,” he replied, coming out into the hall; “mother has been anxious about you; do you know that?”

There was a tone of irritation in his voice.

“I am very sorry if that is so, but my lonely walk has done me a world of good.”

“Little woman,” cried a voice from within, “none but headstrong girls, or women in love, take lonely walks.”

It was the doctor, who had come in to have half an hour’s chat with his godchild.

“Your diagnosis is wrong, doctor,” I answered merrily; “I am neither obstinate nor love-sick;” and I passed up the stairs with a steady tread. I felt that my face was flaming red, but the darkness concealed my heightened color.

Mamsell put her head out of the door as I passed. “Oh, but the master was angry when you could not be found, Fräulein von Werthern;

his paper lay on the table unread, and the coffee was waiting."

Yes, sure enough—his paper !

"Back again?" said Lotta, and continued her playing.

I sat down quietly at the sewing-table, and tried to think how I should set about being proud. I had a humiliating sense of defeat, before I had fairly begun the struggle. What a curious whim it was in Fritz that he should suddenly show so much concern about my movements.

The days brought little change to our peaceful household. Lotta played the piano, and I bandaged Fritz's arm, and read him his paper, just as usual. We all ate together, and 'twas only natural that Lotta should gradually come more frequently to the general sitting-room ; for why should she sit upstairs alone? She was more reserved than formerly, but she looked lovelier than ever, with her beautiful hair in a simple coil at the back of her neck, and a little, unpretentious white apron tied round her waist, as, with gentle voice, she asked her hostess whether she could not be of assistance in some way. She appeared so broken and so remorseful, but her changed manner made no impression upon the sceptical and apprehensive mother.

Frau Roden had never treated Lotta with as much courtesy and deference as during these days.

One day, when the servant had served Frau Roden with soup before any one else, the old lady broke out impatiently: "Rieke, how often have I told you that the countess must be served first?" and she took the plate, and placed it before my sister with so much energy that resistance was out of the question.

As the servant left the room Lotta expostulated:

"My dear Frau Roden, I beg that you will spare me from this dreadful title of countess; pray call me Lotta again."

"That, my dear countess, is a liberty I could never permit myself to take; I think we must both see that it is impossible."

Lotta turned pale, but said nothing, and Fritz began talking as if he had not heard a syllable of what had passed.

The holidays were approaching. Snow lay on the mountains and on the fields. The German army was moving on Paris from all sides, and the iron girdle was tightening closer and closer about the unhappy capital. Fortunately, there was no one now, in whom we were interested, exposed to the ice and cold in the enemy's

country. The son of the house was at home, nursing his wound; our Hans was sleeping in a soldier's grave, on the field of St. Privat, and Lotta's husband was never named; whether she still thought of him, and what she thought, I was to learn later—by accident.

Late one afternoon, just as the postman handed me a letter, addressed to our hostess, and marked with the stamp of our army in the field, Anita came in and asked to speak to me.

I led her into Frau Roden's chamber, for Lotta was upstairs.

"Wait a moment, until I give Frau Roden this letter," I said, and hurried into the sitting-room, where mother and son were talking together, in the gathering darkness.

"Who is it?" cried the old lady. "Oh, I know the step—it's our Helena."

"Yes, it is I, and I have a letter here for you, a letter from the army."

"What in the world can it be?" she asked, as she took the letter. "Helena, ring for Rieke, to light the lamp. A letter from the army to me? Why, I don't know a soul at the front except our David, and the chief forester's George. From whom is it, Helena?"

"I really do not know," I protested, and went back to Anita.



“Well, Anita, here I am. What do you wish?”

“Fräulein von Werthern,” the girl began, “Lord Chamberlain von Oerzen is here. I believe he intends to call upon the countess to-morrow. He is evidently in a very bad humor, and asked how it happened that the countess had not continued to occupy her apartments in the castle.

“I said that she grew lonely and melancholy, and wanted to be with her sister. Well, the long and the short of it is, that they have heard at Court what everybody is talking of here, namely, that Herr Roden and the countess have been reconciled, and that it is not at all impossible that they may blot the royal marriage entirely from their memory, and renew their old engagement. The duchess, however, considers such an arrangement quite dangerous, for the prince is by no means delighted with his parents’ energetic interference with his dream of a love marriage.

“In short, Fräulein von Werthern, as far as I could make out from the questions which the lord chamberlain put to me, the Court is determined, at any price, to dissuade the countess from such a course; for, if she should remain here, and the prince thus have an opportunity of meet-

ing her frequently, his future marriage would have little prospect of happiness."

"My dear Anita," I said, "if the two young people desire to marry, the duke will not be able to prevent it; but matters have not gone so far as that, yet; Fritz Roden is ill, and my sister is not yet divorced."

"I only wanted to give you warning, Fräulein von Werthern. It seems to me that I am paying a debt to my own conscience, if I can serve the countess in any way. You know that in the spring it was I who carried to her all the prince's letters."

"I knew that long ago," I replied bitterly.

"I am very sorry for it now," she said softly, "but I had no option. You cannot know how violent the prince's passion was, nor how skilfully the countess fanned the flame by her apparent indifference."

"Regret can change nothing now, Anita."

She lingered a moment at the door, and then went away, and I returned to the sitting-room.

At the first glance I saw that the army letter, which lay on the table before Frau Roden, must have contained something of special importance, for the little woman was unusually agitated, and looked up at me oddly over her spectacles with an air of interrogation and reproof, as if she were

about to accuse me of some flagrant transgression.

Fritz had disappeared.

Not having the slightest conception of what the letter contained, I said :

“ No bad news, I hope ? ”

“ No, Helena, but unexpected news. You might have given me your confidence, my child.”

I was dumfounded.

“ What is it all about ? ”

“ About you.”

“ About me ! ”

“ Yes ; here’s a letter for you, enclosed in the one for me. It contains an offer of marriage——”

“ For me ? ” And I laughed more heartily than I had done for many a day.

“ But, child, there is nothing to laugh at, God knows,” said the old lady petulantly.

“ But who in the world would send me an offer of marriage ? It must be a mistake ; the writer means Lotta.”

“ Not so fast, Helena. Sit down, please, and I’ll read to you the letter which was addressed to me.”

I was curious to learn what the letter contained, and took my seat obediently.

“ It is signed ‘ Von Brenken, Captain of the 10th Regiment.’ ” As she pronounced the name, she gave me a searching look.

“I know him,” I replied hesitatingly; “he was my father’s adjutant, and came daily to our house. Nevertheless, he must mean Lotta——”

She interrupted me, and began to read :

“HONORED MADAME :

“You will doubtless be surprised that the stranger who writes these lines should venture to address you with an earnest request respecting what is to him a matter of the gravest importance. Your kind assistance will place him under the obligation of everlasting gratitude.

“You have, living with you, a daughter of my old commander, Fräulein Helena von Werthern. I am, perhaps, not in error when I assume that you, my dear madam, have taken a mother’s place toward the young lady. And, therefore, I apply to you, in the first instance. I have long loved Fräulein von Werthern ; her gracious presence, and her gentle, kind manner, early inspired me with a sincere passion ; and although up to this time I have kept myself modestly in the background, and have given her no word or indication of my affection, the reason was, that I had nothing to offer her which would make her future secure.

“Two weeks ago I received a captain’s commission ; I possess a small fortune, and need hesitate no longer to ask Fräulein von Werthern to become my wife. You will shake your head, perhaps, over my folly in dreaming of love and wooing, amidst the turmoil of battle and the dangers of war ; but here in camp, and facing the enemy, I have felt more strongly than ever the longing to tell her that I love her, and to know if she kindly remembers me. So I send you the enclosed letter, with the request that you place it in Fräulein von Werthern’s hands.”

She ceased reading, and I could not find a word for reply. It was a new and powerful sensation for me to realize that some one loved me and desired me. "Is it possible that any one has taken notice of me?" I murmured unconsciously and half aloud.

Frau Roden arose and went into the next room.

I put out my hand eagerly for the letter. Yes, there it was; addressed in bold, manly characters, too: "Fräulein Helena von Werthern."

I took up the missive with a sensation of incomparable satisfaction. I had not the feeling of triumph and joy which thrills a girl's soul when she receives the homage of the man to whom her heart belongs. My joy was of a different sort—like that of a flower which has blossomed unnoticed in the shade, and upon which at last a stray sunbeam falls. I was so grateful to the writer, whom I had seen a thousand times, without the slightest suspicion of what was going on in his heart.

The image of the tall, blue-eyed man rose distinctly before my eyes; silent, earnest, and courteous, indefatigable in his endeavor to win his commander's commendation; and I remembered now that there were tears in his eyes when he pressed my hand by my father's open grave. And he loved me!

I stood a long time before I brought myself to the point of breaking the seal, and then I read his honest, loving words.

How was it possible?

When I went upstairs Lotta had lit her lamp, and was writing.

“Bless me, how you look!” she exclaimed.

I told her with some difficulty what had happened, and showed her the letter.

“What! Von Brenken! You don’t mean to say so? And that’s the reason he loitered so eternally in the corridor. Well, it’s a great piece of good fortune, and I congratulate you; and now that I think of it, you suit one another exactly.”

At this remark my thoughts took another turn.

“I do not know him well enough,” I replied, “and besides, I do not love him.”

“Now, for Heaven’s sake don’t begin that,” she cried. “It’s a tremendous piece of good fortune for you, Helena.”

“I have my own peculiar notions about happiness,” I rejoined.

“Yes, I suppose you’d rather start a boarding-school, or rent furnished rooms at a summer resort,” she said impatiently.

“I’d rather do that than deceive an honest, good man.”

“What are you talking about?” she asked.

“How do you mean deceive him? Of course you never thought of this lover who has fallen from the clouds, and you cannot love him on the spur of the moment. He loves you, and that is enough.”

“I cannot tell you all my reasons, Lotta; but I beg you to assume that they are sufficient, and allow me to act without any importunities from you.”

She gave me a searching look, and said slowly :

“Is it possible that your heart is no longer free?”

And as the hot blood rushed tumultuously to my face, she nodded her head with a long-drawn “Ah! is that it?—but think it over well, Helena, ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’ Ask your worldly-wise patron downstairs, and she will confirm what I tell you.”

I made no answer, but got pen, ink, and paper, and sat down to write—a refusal. Of course I could not tell him why I declined his offer, any more than I could deceive his honest heart by pretending to give him mine, in which there was no place for him.

I wrote him kindly and graciously, and wished him sincerely another and a truer happiness than he could find with me.

At eight o'clock Lotta and I went down to



tea. Fritz did not come to the table; he did not feel so well, his mother said, and he preferred eating in his room.

“In January, Fritz is going to Wiesbaden,” she continued, “the doctor says he can go now, for his wounds are fully healed. I should gladly have accompanied him, but everything would fall into confusion in my absence; Rieke is deaf, and the under-servants will not obey honest old Müller.”

“Why, I will oversee things,” I suggested.

“You?” said the old lady. “No, no, Helena; girls in love make bad housekeepers.”

I laughed so heartily that both women looked at me in surprise.

“Dear Frau Roden,” began Lotta, “now that our conversation has touched upon this point, I wish you would reason with Helena a little; you know our condition. Is it not foolishness for her to scruple to accept this offer just because she doesn’t love the captain?”

Frau Roden gave me a sudden look. “It’s an old proverb, countess,” she said, “that words are lost where a marriage is concerned; that’s a matter for the two alone, and each must settle the question with his own heart.”

Lotta said nothing. I kept my eyes fixed on my plate. If she only knew that my letter of

refusal was already on its way to France. What has love to do with long deliberation? Had I reflected from morn till eve for one hundred days, my decision would not have been different. And because I was a poor girl, before whose eyes the future lay dark and sombre, should I give to an honest man a promise which came from the head and not from the heart, and walk by his side through life like a homesick wanderer whose eyes turn ever toward the land where the heart remains, and yet who may not think of home for fear of sin? No; I was not rational enough for that. The thought chilled my blood. And why could I not go through life alone? It were better far than to be married without love.

After supper, when Lotta had gone upstairs, I took up fresh bandages, and knocked on Fritz Roden's door. "The sister of mercy is here," I cried lightly.

"Come in," he answered.

Frau Roden arose from her chair by her son's side to make room for me, and then went out.

He looked at me so steadily and so searchingly as I stood before him, that I grew red in the face and cast down my eyes.

"And this news comes to us so unexpectedly," he said; "did you know nothing of it? I

think mother was hurt by your want of confidence in her."

I had to laugh in spite of myself. "She couldn't be more astonished than I. Now let me have your arm, please."

"And you are considering it seriously?" he said with an air of constraint.

"Considering it!" I exclaimed indignantly. "What is there to consider?" I believed he wanted to persuade me to accept, and my mood changed from gayety to gloom.

I wound the bandage round his arm with trembling fingers.

"But that you and Lotta, of all persons, should give me this advice, makes me laugh," I exclaimed abruptly. But I was not laughing; on the contrary, the tears stood in my eyes.

He sprang to his feet, and seized my hand. "You're right," he said, "laugh heartily, but it was not kind of you to remind me of the past."

"I did not mean to wound you," I stammered. He had suddenly grown very pale. "And I would not hurt you, either, God knows!"

We stood a moment side by side; he held my hand in his.

"I will beg your pardon, Helena," he whispered, "if——"

“No, no,” I protested, for I suspected what that ‘if’ implied.

At this moment I heard the sound of Lotta’s piano, and involuntarily, as if in pain, I repeated his own words, “Consider, Fritz, consider.” The stupid tears rolled down my cheeks, and I could not wipe them away, for he held both my hands, and he kept them fast.

“You dear, faithful counsellor,” he said warmly, but gave no other answer to my warning. He only sighed, and letting my hands fall, seated himself at the table in silence.

Without a word I left the room. Yes, plainly he loved Lotta still. My warning came too late, and where was his pride? “In love affairs,” my grandmother once said, “men have no pride.” She was right; he had none! And yet how could a man take to his heart again the woman who had once deceived him?

Moodily I sat down by the old lady, who, with sorrowful countenance, was knitting by the evening lamp.

“Have you been crying?” she asked.

The question confused me; for answer I kissed her hand.

“Your head is full of this offer of marriage, Helena.”

“You may scold me and call me unreason-

able, dear Frau Roden, but I cannot marry Captain von Brenken," I declared firmly.

"Dear child," she said, "I will not scold you. God be praised! I feel as if some one were trying to take from me an own daughter," and she kissed me tenderly. "So the man fell in love with your eyes and your sweet face. And true enough, Helena, you are pretty. I always knew it, but never saw it so plainly as I do to-day. Singular that a perfect stranger should be the first to make me realize it." And she kissed me again and looked at me with glad and motherly eyes; and with it all I was so sad—so sad. Where was my pride?





### CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning the lord chamberlain sent to ask when he might speak to her ladyship, the countess. Lotta was sitting in our room at the coffee-table, and gave the answer in person.

“At five o’clock in the evening.”

Anita smiled, for she had just told us that Herr von Oerzen intended to return by the four o’clock train, because he was invited to dine with her grace the duchess, in the evening. I thought that Lotta had not heard what was said, so I spoke up :

“No, Lotta, that will not do. Herr von Oerzen has to——”

“At five o’clock,” she interrupted ; “I have a headache, and am in no condition to sustain an exciting interview. Toward evening my headache generally gets better—I know my constitution.”

“But, Lotta, I can’t be with you at that time, because I have promised Frau Roden to go out with her to make some purchases.”

“But, my sweet child, I have not asked you to be present at this conference.”

“Then it is all right,” I said snappishly, somewhat irritated by her ironical tone.

Lotta drank her coffee coolly, dismissed Anita, who still lingered at the door, and then went into her bed-chamber. I heard her searching through her wardrobe and bureaus; then she came out with her white cashmere tea-gown thrown over her arm, from which she began to rip off the pale blue ribbons. I did not exactly understand the significance of her employment, and went downstairs to attend to some of the household duties, which Frau Roden had gradually laid upon me. I was busy about the house for several hours; the old lady's bunch of keys hung at my girdle as I went my rounds. Then came the cosy afternoon tea, and the daily papers.

Frau Roden was cheerful and in an excellent humor. She sat by Fritz and wrote a long list of purchases for Christmas.

“Now, little Helena,” said she, “put on a brighter face, and don't cry about this affair with the lord chamberlain. That will come about all right.”

But I could not master my depression. I was about to ask her to let me stay with Lotta; my sister's nature was an enigma to me; she seemed so sure of victory—she must be planning something. And I kept thinking continually that



while we were absent she would sit in the twilight with Fritz, talking and laughing gayly, and then, and then—I nearly cried with fear—she was so beautiful and so keen, and he loved her so.

Lotta excused herself from the table on account of her headache. I knew, however, that she was lying on the sofa and nibbling bonbons. Frau Roden, in all compassion, was preparing to hasten upstairs with eau de cologne and lemon-peel, and with difficulty I persuaded her to relinquish her purpose.

“Oh, I see,” she said, smiling. She had learned to know what these headaches meant, while Lotta was a bride. As I went up about four o’clock to fetch my hat and cloak, preparatory to going out, I found Lotta in my chamber attired in a white cashmere robe, trimmed with lace, and just about to place a lovely little cap on her dark hair. I stood riveted to the threshold. She looked so charming in this simple but elegant costume, which suited her figure to perfection. But, notwithstanding, I felt my anxiety increase.

“What is that for?” I asked.

She blushed slightly, and took up her vinaigrette.

“I thought you had gone out,” she replied

evasively, and swept by me like a fairy. And nothing remained in the room save the heavy odor of her sweet perfume.

She had gone into her own room, and I heard her throw herself on the sofa, and I had no doubt she had thrown the deep red silk cover over the lamp-shade, for the blood-red rays of light came through the half-closed doorway. I could not bear to go in and look at her again, and so I went directly down to the front door. I found Frau Roden ready, and waiting in the hallway. Rieke went before us with a lantern and a large basket.

Under the chestnut trees we passed a gentleman, who was hastening toward the house.

“God have mercy on us! What is Lotta going to do?” I said.

“Don’t be so nervous, Helena,” said the old lady consolingly. “It will all come right.”

Had she then no more apprehension, or had she become reconciled to the fact that they two——

We went from one shop to another. I never knew what we bought, and started as if awakened from a dream whenever the old lady asked my advice about anything. Ever before my eyes stood the image of the graceful figure in the pure white dress, with her fair young face, her deep

and glowing eyes, and the warm red light streaming over all.

"Yes, yes," I answered absently, to a question from the old lady.

"Why, Helena, what is the matter with you? You look so pale," she asked.

"Go home at once, child," she continued; "I will finish what has to be done alone. Go, Helena."

I obeyed her mechanically. A few moments I stood before the shop windows collecting my thoughts, and then I rushed forward through the dimly lighted streets. As I neared the house I saw how from Lotta's windows the warm, red light streamed out upon me, through the bare branches of the trees. Upon the curtain fell the shadow of a man's form passing to and fro, between it and the lamp. I looked up and said to myself, "The lord chamberlain is still there."

But the sitting-room windows—our windows—were dark. I wondered at that, for Fritz did not love to sit in the twilight. His was not a nature inclined to idle dreaming.

I entered the house, ascended the stairs, went into my chamber, and flung off my mantle and hat, when suddenly I stood as if transfixed. Plain and clear, I heard Fritz Roden's voice in the adjoining chamber.

“No, that I deny,” said he.

He upstairs—he with Lotta! The door was ajar. I wanted to go and close it. What was it to me what these two said to each other? But I could not stir from the spot; my limbs refused to serve me.

And then there fell on my agonized ear a simple sentence, that was like balm to my troubled heart; so sweet it seemed to me as if I heard from the open heavens a Christmas carol of the angelic choir:

“I may venture to confide to you, my lady, that I love your sister.”

It seemed to me as if I must weep and laugh, as if I must cry aloud, and there fell from my heart the burden and pain of years. I closed my eyes like one who is dazzled by the sudden glory of the sun.

I heard his low tread on the carpet, as he kept up his walk across the room.

Then Lotta laughed.

“Oh, so soon!” said she.

“That is a question which you should not ask,” responded Fritz.

“So you want to give yourself the air of a passionate character, do you? You, of all men, Fritz.” And again she broke out into her clear, ringing laugh, but this time there was a sound in

it which seemed like anger and disdain. Then I heard the sweep of her train over the floor ; she stood just in front of the door, and her shadow cut off the ray of red light which came in through the cracks.

“ Sir,” she said sneeringly, “ we are playing a comedy here. We have the only rôles. Do you want to learn the substance of the piece in a few words? I am going to Dresden to-morrow, into a sort of prison which the duchess has prepared for me there, in order to get me away from here. She is afraid that the prince may not be able to forget me so quickly. I am honest enough to confess that I go very unwillingly—very unwillingly. For that reason I wish to speak to you. I should have remained here—I should gladly have picked up again and placed upon my finger the golden ring which I once flung from my hand. You see I am indeed honest. I say gladly—and do you wish to know for what reason?”

“ Revenge, my lady,” replied Fritz quietly.

“ Yes, for revenge,” she rejoined slowly. “ And you, Fritz Roden, you love me yet. You love me as you did in those days when you sent Helena to me to press your suit. And yet you take your position before me, and with folded arms and an air which could not be more indif-

ferent if you were speaking to your foreman—you utter to me the prodigious falsehood that you love my sister. And if I should ask you 'Why?' then you, as an honest man, would have to answer, 'For revenge, my lady, for revenge!'" And again she began to laugh.

"The reasons which move me are certainly of no interest to you."

"That is true," she cried, "they are of no interest to me. I am only sorry for the poor little fool, for——"

I heard no more. I sprang up and rushed from the room and down the stairs. I stood a moment in the hallway wrestling with my anger, and knew not where to turn. Then I tore open the door and dashed across the court-yard toward the garden;—anywhere, so that nobody saw me.

For revenge!

It had begun to snow; the great white flakes cooled my burning face as they fell. I sat down on the stone bench, under the linden tree. I sat there a long time; I was not cold; I felt nothing, and heard only the one word:

"For revenge!"

The whirling snowflakes fell faster, and covered the garden with a loose, light mantle. My senses swam. I could not think. At last I heard

some one call my name, and the voice sounded strong and loud through the darkness. "Helena! Helena!"

Horrified, I sprang to my feet. I could not meet him again that night, and I fled farther and farther along the old and well-known path, and deeper and deeper into the garden, till I stood before the door of our former dwelling. I put my hand in my pocket, and found the key, and with trembling haste I unlocked the door and ran upstairs to my grandmother's room, and buried myself in her old arm-chair.

There, I fancied, I should be secure and undisturbed, and for that moment I wanted nothing more.

The chamber was as still as death. In the dim light reflected from the snow outside I was soon able to distinguish the objects in the room; there stood the great, high bedstead, yonder the writing-table; and as I recognized these familiar objects there rose before my soul with awful distinctness the picture of the past. I saw Lotta standing there with Fritz, the tender, ardent lover.

Does love then die so soon? Oh, no, she was right; he loved her now as he did then. But he had been wronged, and he was proud, and in his own defence he had taken refuge behind the pre-



tence of a new affection. And so he had told the beautiful woman who had thought to bring him again to her feet: "I love another; and this other, since she is so conveniently at hand, is your sister."

"The poor little fool!" She would certainly be unspeakably happy to receive this distinction, for had she not in a thousand ways already betrayed that her heart was his alone?

His man's pride was fully satisfied; the beautiful *fiancée* of other days was humbled to the earth, and there was plenty of time in the future to determine what to do with the sister. He was avenged.

I leaned my arms upon the cushions of the old sofa, and began to reflect. I could not remain here any longer, that was clear. I would not go with Lotta; the thought filled me with honest indignation, and I clinched my hands in defiant anger. I might go to Berlin to some hospital. Yes, I would do that in the morning. Then there fell into my brain, like a spark of fire, the name Brenken. Yes, yes, I whispered, there is an honest human heart. The words were scarcely uttered when the hot blood rushed to my face, and I felt myself overpowered by a sense of shame. No, that can never be. There was a strange singing in my ears. I felt my

temples throb against the cushions. Again the feeling of dizziness came over me, and with trembling hands I reached out to grasp the back of a chair which stood near; I seemed to be sinking, sinking in a bottomless abyss. Once I thought I heard my grandmother call my name, and her voice seemed a long way off; then the ringing in my ears came back, and at last I sprang up in terror, and looked toward the door. I saw in the flickering light of a lantern a tall form, and heard a voice say: "For God's sake, Helena!" and then I knew no more.

They told me afterward that Fritz and his mother had found me lying unconscious in my grandmother's chair, and when the old lady had put me to bed, and the doctor had come, and said that I should probably have a long illness, that Lotta grew deadly pale and went to her room without a word; they had traced me to my hiding-place by my footprints in the snow. When the fever had left me, and I became once more conscious, the light of a clear January day shone in at the windows, and two kind old motherly eyes were looking down upon me. With difficulty I remembered where I was and what had happened, and there was little in my recollection to aid my recovery.

"Where's Lotta?" I asked seriously.

“In Dresden, child,” answered the old lady, quietly; “she has been there for several weeks.”

“Alone?” I stammered.

“No, no; the duchess has provided for her like a mother; she is living with Frau von Millern, who used to be a maid of honor to her grace.”

I was silent. I was so tired and weak that I sank again into half unconsciousness; but I heard the gentle movements of my kind watcher, and knew that I was very ill, and had been so for a long time; and there seemed to me no object in ever getting well. Soon the doctor came in.

“Well, well!” said he cheerily, “that’s what I call looking at life with new eyes. Now, just eat a little something; do as you’re told, and have no foolish thoughts, and we’ll have you well immediately; and I think the little lady will be careful after this not to sit on stone benches under linden trees, in mid winter, as if it were in May. Won’t she?” And the little old man pressed my hand lightly and went into the next room.

“You can start on your trip now, Fritz,” I heard him say. “She’s getting on famously.”

Thank God, he was going away, and before he came back I should be well; so well that I

could find my way alone, far, far out into the world.

Then I fell asleep, and slept a long time. I was awakened by whispering voices near me. It seemed to me some one kissed my hand. It was dark in the chamber, except for the little circle of light which the lamp threw on the ceiling. I could not tell whether it was evening or morning.

“God be with you, my dear boy,” I heard Frau Roden say ; and then some one seemed to leave the room, and I heard the trampling of horses, and the noise of a rolling wagon in the court beneath.

Fritz Roden had left the house. He had taken leave of me. I laid my cheek upon the hand which he had kissed, and wept.

Now, indeed, we were parted forever.

My recovery progressed rapidly. There came a day when I left my bed for an hour, and then there came an hour when I was able to sit with Frau Roden at the table ; and later at mid-day, when the sun was bright, I was permitted to walk a little in the garden ; and finally I was well—entirely well.

Nothing now restrained me from carrying out my resolutions of going to Berlin, except a foolish dread of the parting.

One evening, as we sat together in the sitting-room, I began with a heavy heart to unfold my plan.

The old lady smiled.

"I have no authority to consent to your departure," said she.

I was nervous and irritable, and my answer sounded strange enough as I replied, excitedly: "I need no one's permission for my actions."

She did not resent my words, but rather acted as if she had not heard or understood them.

"You won't leave me while Fritz is away, Helena? It is not a very nice thing for me to say to you, but then I know you will understand me when I tell you that I really am a little exhausted from anxiety and nursing, child. And Fritz—you know men have no judgment in such things—would not hear of any one's touching you except me."

As she spoke she leaned over me so that I was compelled to look straight into her eyes.

"Very well then," I stammered, "until he comes back. But tell me honestly when he will return."

She still acted as if she did not understand.

"He used to like to surprise me by an unexpected return. But, Helena, what do you mean?"

Are you afraid of Fritz? What has he done to you?"

"I cannot tell you," I answered, "if he has not done so."

"I don't know anything about it," continued the old Frau. "The strangest thing to me was Lotta's departure. Of course you saw nothing of it. The trunks were packed in haste the afternoon you fell ill. There was such a noise and confusion upstairs that we put a bed for you down here. Fritz was moved back forthwith into his old room. In the meanwhile you lay on the sofa in the sitting-room and jabbered all manner of senseless stuff. Our house was suddenly filled with people that had no business there. The doctor sat by your side and shook his head. The lord chamberlain was upstairs. Lotta had him called back in great haste, and Rieke caught him just as he was about to enter the train. Anita ran up and downstairs with boxes and packages, and I stood in the midst of it all, and had not the slightest conception of what the whole confusion was about. Fritz was silent as the grave, and what you were saying had no sense in it.

"The next morning, at nine o'clock, Lotta came downstairs, attired in a satin mantle, trimmed with fur, and took leave of you. She

seemed to be in a great hurry ; the ducal carriage was waiting outside. Fritz accompanied her to the carriage, where the Lord Chamberlain von Oerzen was standing, with his hat in his hand, as if Lotta were the duchess herself.

“ ‘ Write to me if Helena should get worse,’ she called to Fritz, as the carriage started. Fritz replied with the deepest bow he ever made in his life. Then the horses struck into a trot and she was gone.

“ When Fritz came into the house again, I seized him by the lapel of his coat and said to him, ‘ Now you will tell me what has happened ?’

“ ‘ When she is better, mother,’ he said evasively ; ‘ let me alone now, and go to her.’

“ That is all I know,” said the old lady in conclusion.

“ And has Lotta not written ?”

“ No, only a few cards with inquiries about your condition. The worst time with you was about Christmas. But now it is all over, thank God. And in the field we have had victory after victory. We have a German emperor, now. And our Fritz—I don’t mean the Prussian Crown-Prince, but our own Fritz, Helena, has the iron cross ; it came on Christmas Eve.”

“ Our Fritz !” I shook my head and rose to



my feet. She certainly knew nothing. But I stayed.

Whenever a letter came from Wiesbaden, I repeated my question: "When will he be home?" "It is not yet settled," was the invariable answer. The early spring came in softly, and, as the first snow-bells bloomed in the garden, came the news of peace. The camp-fires were covered up. The emperor left Versailles and returned to Berlin. Never has a spring more glorious risen over Germany. What a time of joy and exultation!

"When he comes home."

That was a phrase we heard a thousand times in those days. "When he comes home."

It was the seventh of March. As I went through the kitchen I heard Rieke say:

"When he comes home we will go together to our parents, and in the summer we will be married. And, girls, every one of you shall come to the wedding."

I turned around and looked into the girl's red face, which fairly beamed with its joyous anticipation. The servants all looked especially happy that day.

Just as I was entering the sitting-room I met Frau Roden, who was coming out of her son's chamber with her duster in her hand.

“If we don’t clean up now and then,” she said, “the dust ruins everything.” Then she walked to the hall door and shook out her cloth energetically.

Out of doors a flood of golden sunshine lit up the landscape. It was a real spring day, so full of promise and of joy. One of those days which soften the heart and strengthen faith in all that is good and glorious.

“Would you not like to take a run through the garden, Helena? I shall be greatly surprised if you do not find some early violets.”

I was standing beside her as she spoke, and was looking out into the yard.

“Where is the carriage going?” I asked, for I saw that the coachman was harnessing the horses to the landau.

“To the wheelwright,” responded Frau Roden; “the right—not the left—front wheel is injured.”

“Is he putting on livery to go to the wheelwright’s?”

“But, child, do you think he would sit on the box in his stable-jacket? You do not know Jurgen.”

I looked at her inquisitively, but she gazed innocently up to the blue heaven on which a few fleecy white clouds were floating.

“ Ah, this is a delightful day,” she said enraptured.

After a little while she continued : “ I can’t but think of those who have no joy on this spring, because their loved ones will never more come home. Helena, if we were standing here and looking over the court-yard, knowing that he would never come in through the gate again, and that I should never again hear the sound of his voice, I do not believe I could bear to look at the blue heaven and see the bright sunshine.”

As she spoke it seemed to me that the sun did grow paler, and the blue of the heavens above took on a sombre hue.

“ It would be horrible,” I murmured ; but in my heart I felt the bitter sarcasm, “ what is it to you ? ”

Suddenly it occurred to me that I was carrying in my pocket a letter from Lotta, which I had not yet had the courage to open. I went quickly to my room and broke the seal.

“ Dear Helena : ” she wrote :

“ From day to day I watch for the announcement of your betrothal. What is the matter? I am not mistaken ; Fritz told me once he loved you, and I am curious to know if he has been brave enough to ask you——”

I crushed the paper in my hand. I could not

read farther. Oh, if I were only away from here. I was singularly restless that day. It seemed to me there was an unusual stir in the house. I ran through all the rooms and searched for a confirmation of my suspicions, but could see nothing.

It will be best for me to make my preparations soon, I thought, as I went downstairs to look for my trunk. I wanted to see if it was all right, and ready for travelling. But I could not find it. Perhaps Lotta has taken it, I said to myself. Sure enough, Lotta; with her name came the recollection of her letter. I determined to finish reading it, and sat down on an old chest and began to read :

“ I am getting on famously. The pleasures of the city have given me new life. I cannot understand how I should ever have thought for a moment of staying in that wretched Rotenberg. My *ci devant* husband has secured for me a much more considerable pension than his economic mamma had intended. Herr von Oerzen gave me this information. Unfortunately I can't invite you to visit me because I am, after a fashion, a guest myself in the house of Frau von Millern, although I pay my way. Moreover, you would not enjoy the life we live here. Your quiet farm and two blue eyes are enough for you.”

I read no further. I could have cried with anger, but no tears came to my relief; the house was still as death. The sun shone in through

the dormer window, and a thousand motes danced in its beams. As I sat there I heard the noise of wheels in the court below and the merry cracking of the coachman's whip, and a man's voice that I knew well. My heart stood still with fright and shame. He had come home!

Soon I heard him calling "Helena! Helena!" but I never stirred. A thought flashed through my mind—nobody will look for me here, and when night comes I can steal away unobserved. How and whither? I neither knew nor cared. Only that I might escape him, I—the poor little fool—"her sister."

I heard them hunting and searching. I was glad to know myself secure, but yet at heart I felt a strange misgiving. The voices now passed into the court-yard and garden, and I could tell that the searchers were anxious and excited.

Then I heard Fritz shouting, "Jurgen, put the bays in the hunting-wagon at once." I sprang to my feet, but still I could not go down. I began to feel ashamed of myself. Was it not, after all, a childish prank to hide myself? Ought I to let him see that I feared to meet him? Where was my pride? So I went downstairs with heavy feet and a feeling of impotent weakness. All was still now on the lower floor,

but from the court-yard came the sound of the tramping of horses. With trembling hands I opened the door of Frau Roden's chamber, and entered. I heard a measured tread in the next room pacing to and fro, and the soothing voice of the old lady saying, "Now, Fritz, do be calm; you'll certainly find her at the station."

"God grant it," he said bitterly. "I do not know what will become of me if she does not come back."

"But Fritz——"

"Mother," he said in the greatest excitement, "this house is nothing to me without Helena. I can't live without her. You have lulled me into security. You told me that she loved me, and yet you have not understood how to keep her safely. Oh, why did I go away without her promise?"

The old lady made no answer, as was her wont, but quickly turned and entered her bed-chamber. She gave me a surprised and reproachful look when she saw me standing there, but said not a word. In a moment she took my listless hand and pressed it between both hers. "I will send him to you here," she whispered.

She turned to go, but I fell on her neck in deadly fear.

“No, no!” I cried, “I could not bear it. If I should be deceived; if, after all, only to avenge himself, he——”

The sitting-room door closed with a bang. Fritz had gone out.

The old lady quickly disengaged herself from my embrace.

“At this moment he is starting to search for you in fear and despair; do you think that looks like calculation or revenge? Go to the window, Helena. Do not let him go; and then, when he stands in your presence, and you look in his troubled eyes, ask his pardon for having thought the truest man in all the world—a hypocrite.”

She opened the door, and I followed her submissively through the sitting-room to the window which looked out into the court-yard. He had just taken the reins from the coachman, when I tapped loudly on the pane. I did not see him spring from down the seat, for I had not the courage to open my eyes; but I heard his joyous exclamation as he sprang into the house. The door flew open, and an instant after I was folded in his arms.

Where now were doubt and care and pain? Gone like the ice and snow.

The spring-time and sunshine of my life had come.



“Helena, you dear, dear girl, say yes?”

“You love me—her sister?”

“No, not ‘her sister,’ but you yourself—the one, the only one. You must know it, Helena. I have loved you long.”

“Ah, I thought you could never forget Lotta.”

“Lotta?” he said, “Lotta? Why, Helena, would I have invited her to remain in my house had I not been fully armed against her power by my affection for you? How gladly I would have told you how dear you were to me, had I not feared in those days of sickness that I could not bear it should you answer no. And so I tried to tell it to you secretly; that’s why I marked the passage in ‘Ekkehard,’ for I saw that you were anxious about me, on account of the lovely woman in the room above. But you would not understand it. Oh, how proud you can be, Helena!”

“What was the passage?” I asked.

“Blessed is the man who hath overcome,” he answered. “But to-day I say, thrice blessed is the man who hath found.”

Then I told him of the conversation between him and Lotta, which I had accidentally overheard.

He smiled and shook his head.

“If you had listened a little longer,” said he, “much would have been spared to you and me, for then you would have heard my answer.”

“What was your answer?” I whispered.

“No, not for revenge, my lady ; revenge is the weapon of a heart wounded unto death, and my heart is healed—long, long ago. And the healing was done by a pair of quiet, soft eyes, and a dear, gentle girlish face.—Now, do you want to go away?” he said, releasing me from his embrace, yet with the air of one who is sure of his ground.

“Ah, Fritz !” I murmured, “I should have been wretched all my life.”

Then he took me by the hand, and led me to his mother.

“My dear children,” was her simple and heart-felt blessing.

Hark ! The bells are ringing, and their merry tones sounding out across the happy land proclaim the glad tidings that peace reigns once more in the Fatherland

In the village church and in the great cathedral, by every flowing river, and from every hill and valley, rises the solemn refrain :

To united Germany, peace ! God bless our Kaiser, who enters Berlin to-day !

How the flags waved in the warm summer wind, and how the people rejoiced.

On the 10th of May peace was signed at Frankfort, and to-day, on the evening of June 16, Rotenberg gives a banquet in the city hall to her victorious sons.

Fritz Roden could not be present; he had led me on that day to the altar, and the old pastor had said that indeed was a fitting marriage day—the day of the festival of peace. And may peace dwell forever in our hearts—peace between us from this day on until death shall part us.

Only a few guests sat at our wedding supper, “but all went merry as a marriage bell.” And when Frau Roden gave me the bundle of keys, how proudly and yet how timidly I took the emblem of my new dignity, and how tenderly I kissed the dear old mother.

The windows were open, and strains of distant music floated in upon us with every breeze. Lights were flaming in every window, triumphant emblems of German might and unity.

Fritz and I stole away for a moment from the merry company, and walked hand in hand through the garden. We sat down under the linden tree and spoke of all that had happened since I came to Rotenberg, and how wonderfully it had all come about.

As we rose to go back to the house, we heard revellers cheering in the town hall.

“Helena,” said Fritz, “what word is so blessed as the simple word peace? May God keep the Fatherland. May God keep our house in perfect peace.”

The years rolled round. The anniversary of our wedding was always a gala-day with us. On one anniversary we had an especial celebration.

Between mother and me sat a wonderfully beautiful lady in rich toilet. When the glasses clinked together, every one of my brave lads wanted to drink a toast with their beautiful Aunt Lotta. She had come to act as god-mother to my only daughter. The christening was to take place that evening. We had not seen each other since she had gone away, and long and often had I to beg ere she consented to make us a visit.

She had married a second time, several years before. Her husband, an Austrian Baron L., was a member of the embassy to Italy, and they had lived a long time in Rome. She had no children. Indeed she was a good deal disquieted by the affectionate demonstrations of my children.

“When one is not accustomed to children—” she said apologetically.

Late in the evening, when all the guests had retired, we stood together in the chamber which had been Lotta’s, and which we had again prepared for her reception. She looked about a long time.

“There is not the slightest change in your old nest, Helena—downstairs and upstairs—every piece of furniture stands in the same old spot.”

“Only that now I am downstairs and mother sleeps above; formerly it was the other way, you know.”

She stepped to the window and looked over at the castle, whose white walls glistened in the moonlight, through the young leaves of the chestnut trees. I saw, as she stood there, a sad, tired expression come over her fair face. I threw my arm around her. “Oh, Lotta,” I said, “if I only knew one thing. Are you happy?”

“Happy?” she said, as she looked past me into the night. “What is happiness, Helena? I have everything that is usually included under the term: a husband who adores me when he can spare the time from the turf, elegant surroundings, society, theatre, dress, carriages, travel—if that is happiness? I am, I fear, not

capable of feeling happiness. How is it with you, Helena ? ”

“ Oh, Lotta, God be thanked, I am unspeakably happy.”

“ One can see it in your face ; and in his, too,” she murmured.

As she drove away she kissed little Lottie ; then turning to me, she whispered in a low tone :

“ Peace is surely with you.”

Fritz was standing by the carriage door, and by his side stood my youngest boy, who held out to his aunt a nosegay of the rarest and finest roses in our garden.

“ Father gives you this, Aunt Lotta,” said the dear little fellow, as he handed her the flowers.

She took the bouquet, and turning her face away, she stepped into the carriage and drew her veil over her streaming eyes.

“ Farewell, Lotta,” we cried.

Fritz and I stood arm in arm and waved her an adieu as she went back to her restless, gay life, with its deceptive glitter and splendor.

Then we turned to look at our children playing in the shadows of a mighty German oak. In our old-fashioned house dwell happiness and peace.















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